

DISCOURSE TRADITIONS: FROM THE EMERGENCE TO THE PRODUCTIVITY OF A PARADIGM

Aurea Zavam*
Joaquim Dolz**

- **ABSTRACT:** This article takes the concept of discourse tradition as its starting point, to discuss its productivity in studies that seek to investigate both the history of languages and the history of texts, and for those that cast an investigative eye over traces of permanence and traces of change in texts of more recent synchronies. To this end, it engages with the founding texts of the concept, notably those created within German romanistics, thus exposing its theoretical design, and it also points out the spread of this concept, examining its reach among different researchers and its possibilities for analysis in studies on textual genres. The theoretical exercise highlights Eugenio Coseriu's significant contribution to establishing the paradigm of discourse traditions and reveals its legitimacy both for the study of linguistic-textual phenomena and for Portuguese language teaching, as highlighted in the conclusion of this paper. It is hoped that the studies revisited and the reflections presented will help advance this line of research beyond the spaces it has already reached, in order to stimulate new investigations and foster further dialogue.
- **KEYWORDS:** Historicity of texts; Change and permanence in genres; Portuguese language teaching.

Starting the dialogue

Not long ago, we began to see studies that adopt the concept of discourse tradition as a paradigm for better understanding linguistic phenomena, especially those related to the history of languages and texts¹. In fact, this concept is not as recent as it might

* Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC), Departamento de Letras Vernáculas, Fortaleza, CE, Brasil. Professora Associada. aurea@ufc.br. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1645-3330>

** Université de Genève (Unige), Genève, França. Professeur honoraire. joaquim.dolz-mestre@unige.ch. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1488-0240>

¹ Among these pioneering works, we can mention the work organised by German romanists Daniel Jacob and Johannes Kabatek in 2001, *Lengua medieval y tradiciones discursivas en la Península Ibérica*, which brings together articles by various researchers who focus on different phases and different textual genres of medieval Ibero-Romance with the aim, among others, of investigating the textual traditions and the processes of elaboration through which the languages

first appear. Although the term was first introduced to the public in 1988, as Kabatek (2021) emphasizes, by Peter Koch and Wulf Österreicher, in articles for a publication commemorating Coseriu, titled *Energeia und Ergon - Studia in honorem Eugenio Coseriu*, the idea had already been proposed by Brigitte Schlieben-Lange in 1983, with *Traditionen des Sprechens. Elemente einer pragmatischen Sprachgeschichtsschreibung*². Both this production and the previous two have their foundations in the work of Eugenio Coseriu, particularly in the postulates established by the Romanian linguist to explain the functioning of language and language change, and highlight the role of both linguistic traditions, those linked to language as a historically given system, and discourse traditions, that is, textual traditions contained in the cultural memory of a community, in the traditional ways of saying or writing (Kabatek, 2005).

Schlieben-Lange, who developed his doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Coseriu at the end of the 1960s, established a dialogue between the Romanian master's thesis and aspects of Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics, and then proposed, in the aforementioned work, a Historical Pragmatics, relating the discussion of orality and literacy to a historical view, and also highlighting the existence of another history besides the history of languages – the history of texts. In doing so, Schlieben-Lange laid the groundwork for what we now know as the paradigm of discourse traditions (Kabatek, 2005).

Since then, the concept of discourse tradition (henceforth DT) has proved to be very productive for many linguistic studies, both from a diachronic point of view, as a branch of Diachronic Linguistics, and from a synchronic point of view, as a possibility for dialogue with other areas, such as Sociolinguistics³, Acquisition of writing⁴, Discourse Analysis⁵ and Linguistics of Textual Genres⁶. Initially confined to Tübingen and Freiburg, the cities where the pioneering studies were carried out, the model spread to other German institutions, where it found an echo in the research of Jungbluth (1996), Stoll (1997) and Aschenberg (2003), for example. It went beyond German borders and spread to other countries such as Spain in Europe, and Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Peru in Latin America. For instance, in Spain, we can mention studies conducted by López Serena (2011, 2021a), Pons Rodríguez (2008); in Argentina, Ciapuscio (2012);

of the Peninsula were constituted as languages of culture, thus exploring the relationship between the historicity of languages and the historicity of texts.

² The Portuguese version was published in 1993, translated by Fernando Tarallo et al. under the title *História do falar e história da linguística*, by the publisher of the State University of Campinas.

³ In Historical Sociolinguistics, we can cite Lopes (2011), with the variation of the pronouns “tu” and “você” in personal letters written between 1906 and 1937.

⁴ Cf. Longin-Thomazi (2011), who investigates the acquisition of discourse traditions by primary school children, and Lopes-Damásio (2014, 2019, 2022), who, in various studies, has looked at the mechanisms of junction, taken as discourse traditions, in children's writing texts.

⁵ Cf. Andrade (2010), who analyses reader's letters published in São Paulo newspapers in the years 1828 and 1893, using, among other categories, some from Critical Discourse Analysis.

⁶ Cf. Zavam (2009), who analyses the socio-political and historical trajectory of the newspaper editorial in copies published in Ceará newspapers in the 19th and 20th centuries.

in Brazil, Costa (2010), Gomes (2007), Longhin (2014), Lopes (2011), Zavam (2009); in Mexico, Gallegos Shibya (2003), Mendoza Posadas (2020); in Peru, Garatea (2001)⁷.

As we can see, the relevance of this model has established a strong tradition and attracted researchers from various countries committed to discussing phenomena related to the history of Romance languages, as well as to the history of texts/genres recorded in these languages. With the aim, then, of shedding a little more light on the discussions and reflections that have already been undertaken, this article revisits the emergence of the discourse traditions model, dialogues with Coseriu's postulates that underpinned the proposition and expansion of the concept, demonstrates through a brief analytical exercise some of the aspects by which traditions can be recognized in texts and, finally, argues in favour of the productivity of the concept of discourse traditions for the fields of writing acquisition and language teaching, particularly Portuguese language teaching.

Pulling the thread of history

Peter Koch, the aforementioned German Romanist, aimed to clarify the possible ambiguity that the terms “norm” and “language”, as adopted by Coseriu, could generate in the investigation of linguistic variation phenomena, resorts to the term DT not only to contribute to an adequate classification of such phenomena, but also to provide a basis for evaluating different perspectives within language studies in general (Koch, 1988, p. 327). Wulf Österreicher, on the other hand, in the aforementioned work in honour of Coseriu, revisits the Coserian triad of language levels and the concept of DT to discuss both the term “linguistic variation” and a dimension of linguistic variety in the light of this theoretical framework, by analysing variation phenomena that until then had not been clearly and satisfactorily explained in previous research (Österreicher, 1988, p. 356).

In 1990, two years after the publication of the work honoring Coseriu, Koch and Österreicher published the book *Gesprochene Sprache in der Romania – Französisch, Italienisch, Spanisch*⁸ and once again used the concept of DT. Based on the proposed distinction between immediacy and communicative distance (orality/literacy), the researchers launch reflections on some problems of spoken language, using authentic *corpus* material in the three main Romance languages – French, Italian and Spanish. These reflections rest on the argument that an utterance always has two historicities:

⁷ In addition to these works, it is worth mentioning two relevant works for the dissemination of the concept of discourse tradition: the first organised by Ciapuscio et. al. (2006), the result of papers aimed at the diachronic analysis of linguistic phenomena in Latin America, presented at the Freudenistadt Congress in 2004; and the second, volume 7 of the *Para a História do Português Brasileiro*, organised by Andrade and Gomes (2018), focused on the changes and continuities observed by Brazilian researchers over two centuries in genres from different fields. Also noteworthy is the article by López Serena (2021b), which, in addition to discussing the relevance of the concept, makes an exhaustive survey of works that use this paradigm in Spain, Hispanoamerica and Brazil.

⁸ The Spanish version – *Lengua hablada en la Romania: español, francés, italiano* – was translated by Araceli López-Serena and published in 2007 by Gredos in Madrid.

the linguistic, because languages, as historically given systems, are subject to variation; and the textual, because certain regularities are linked to textual schemes and not to a particular language. Building on this premise, which had also been defended by Schlieben-Lange, Koch and Öesterreicher once again made use of the model of the three levels of language – universal, historical and individual – proposed by Coseriu⁹, to which they gave a new configuration: they added the level of discourse traditions alongside the historical level, in order to better determine the nature of the linguistic phenomena being investigated – whether related to orality or literacy (Costa, 2010).

Although this work by Koch and Öesterreicher, as López Serena (2002) points out, is the one in which the authors dedicate themselves most thoroughly and systematically to a theoretical framework that makes it possible to better understand phenomena linked to linguistic variation – and therefore its undeniable relevance, both for historical sociolinguistics and for the dissemination of the concept of DT itself – it was Peter Koch's article, published in 1997, that became the reference for the consolidation of the term – *Diskurstraditionen: zu ihrem sprachtheoretischen Status und ihrer Dynamik*¹⁰, which we will now discuss.

Revisiting Koch's dialogue with Coseriu

In a crucial text for the development of the concept of DT, Peter Koch uses the spontaneous communicative situation of a lorry driver who speaks a German dialect, specifically the Berlin muzzle, to not only present the notion of DT as productive for linguistic investigations that seek to account for the historical dimension of languages, but also to delimit its theoretical field. With this example, the German Romanist makes it clear that the investigation of this type of linguistic phenomenon, in this case dialectal variation, in order to be more successful, must necessarily be conducted from a point of view that takes DT into account. As an argument to support his thesis, Koch initially uses Coseriu's (1980) conception of language, which he sees "as a universal human activity which, in obedience to historically given norms, is exercised by individuals [...]" (Koch [1997]2021¹¹, p. 362). This conception, as we know, results in the well-known three Coserian levels, reproduced by Koch (2021, p. 362), under which language could be analysed:

⁹ Further analysis of the Coserian model will be provided later.

¹⁰ This relevant article for the study of discourse traditions was translated by Alessandra Castilho da Costa and its Portuguese version – *Tradições discursivas: de seu status linguístico-teórico e sua dinâmica* – has been published since 2021 by Revista *Pandaemonium*. Available at: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/pg/article/view/176747/164106>. Accessed on: 17 jan. 2023.

¹¹ In order to avoid transcribing the original text in a footnote whenever we use a direct quote from this article, we have chosen to use the translation, which has been authorised by the author. We have therefore indicated in brackets the year of the original publication followed by the year of publication of the translation ([1997]2021); in subsequent citations only the year of the translation (2021).

universal level	“speaking [...] before any specification of particular languages” (ibid.). also: activity of speaking
historical level	“the historical traditions of speech that apply to each of the linguistic communities that have formed historically [...] (historical languages, dialects, etc.)”. (COSERIU 1973: 6) also: particular language
individual level	“speech act or [...] series of related speech acts performed by an individual in a specific situation” (ibid.) also: speech, text

The driver’s speech is then taken as an example of a unique and individual actualisation (individual level) of the speaking activity (universal level) of a particular language, in this case German (historical level). For Koch, even if, according to the Coserian model, such speech concerns the individual level (of discourse and text), a premise with which he agrees, this alone could not truly explain the phenomenon of the Berlin muzzle; likewise, observation solely from the perspective of the historical level, of the traditions of particular languages, would not be successful either. Koch therefore concludes that there are two distinct types of speaking traditions: one that is anchored in the linguistic-diatopic tradition, when someone, for example, speaks the Berlin dialect (but not the berlin muzzle); and another that crosses this tradition and transcends individual discourse, when someone, for example, speaks specifically the berlin muzzle. This realisation would justify the creation of a dimension that takes account of yet another type of speaking tradition, also historically given, but not the dimension of particular historical languages.

In his proposition, Koch recognises that Brigitte Schlieben-Lange had already established this distinction when, in the aforementioned study on orality and writing, she devoted separate chapters to the level of the activity of speaking, the level of the history of particular languages, and the level of the history of textual traditions. Convinced of the distinction between these two historicities – the historicity of languages and the historicity of text models (and having already defended it in other scholarly contributions), Koch reappropriates the proposal of splitting the historical level, which is grounded in the following framework proposed by Coseriu:

Table 1 – General structure of language

	points of view		
levels	<i>ἐνέργεια</i> activity	<i>δύναμις</i> know	<i>έργον</i> product
universal level	talk in general	elocutionary knowledge	the entirety of spoken language
historical level	concrete language	idiomatic knowledge	(abstract language)
individual level	discourse	expressive knowledge	text

Source: Coseriu (1980, p. 93)¹²

With this table, Coseriu summarised the distinction he made between the fundamental levels of linguistic organisation, according to structural and functional principles. The linguist started from the concept of language as a creative activity, guided by linguistic traditions and realised in concrete texts, to distinguish the three levels already mentioned: i) universal level, ii) historical level, and iii) individual level, which would account for the communicative activity performed by individuals in the most different situations of verbal interaction. As we can see, each of these levels corresponded to a specific plane (point of view) – activity, knowledge, product – resulting in nine sections within the overall structure of language.

Peter Koch, not recognising, either in Coseriu’s synoptic table (see Table 1) or in his explanation of each of the levels, the distinction between the two histories – of languages and texts¹³ – and taking the concept of discourse tradition as crucial for the development of his thesis on medieval traditions in the Italian language, as Kabatek (2021) rightly points out, thus justifies the bipartition of the historical level, which has been added, alongside the history of language, the history of discourse traditions, stating the following:

Therefore, I believe it is essential to duplicate Coseriu’s model at the historical level. Parallel to, or rather across from, traditions and intralinguistic norms, textual traditions or – as I call them – discourse traditions or discourse norms must also be included (Koch, 2021, p. 364).

¹² Although the Portuguese edition dates from 1980, the work was actually conceived during the years 1968 to 1971, when Coseriu taught literature and foreign language classes for the Italian Ministry of National Education. The Portuguese-language publication was therefore the result of this Italian manuscript. It’s worth remembering that this table (as well as the following one, which was originally in Portuguese) has been translated into English.

¹³ The distinction established by Coseriu can be seen in the aforementioned work, *Lições de linguística geral*, and in other texts such as the article *Do sentido do ensino da língua literária*, published in Spanish in 1987, and translated and published in Portuguese in 1993, as we will see below.

Once bipartite, the historical level would thus encompass two dimensions: that of language as a system (grammatical and lexical) and that of discourse tradition (textual), as we can see in the table below.

Table 2 – Levels and domains of language

Level	Field	Type of standard	Type of rule
universal	speaking activity	(see notes 7 and 8)	rules of <i>speech</i>
historical	particular languages	norms of speech	rules of a <i>particular language</i>
historical	discourse tradition	discourse norms	rules of discourse
individual/ current	discourse		

Source: Koch (2021, p. 364)

The table presented by Koch (2021), on the one hand, preserves aspects already identified by Coseriu (1980), and, on the other, introduces an innovation by adding another domain – that of discourse traditions – which, like languages, are regarded as historical phenomena.

Although particular languages and discourse traditions both constitute historical traditions, Koch clarifies that the field of particular languages is not to be confused with that of discourse traditions, even though they are intertwined. Whereas the former, from an intralinguistic point of view, would concern both particular languages and their varieties (for example, Spanish, German, Portuguese, sertanejo, etc.), the latter, from the point of view of discourse traditionality, would be responsible not only for textual genres such as leaflet, sonnet and others, but also for styles, conversational forms, literary forms, speech acts, traditional ways of saying, such as mannerism, troubadourism, oaths, etc.

As for the type of norm (2nd column of the table), footnotes 7 and 8 alluded to by Koch (2021, p. 364-365) make it clear that he is hesitant to refer to norms at the universal level, i.e., attributing “norms of speech” to this level of language, since the term “norm” is usually taken to mean “historical-conventional quantities.” In the subsequent note, however, he clarifies that he sees no issue in employing the term “rule” at the universal level (“rules of speech”), as he prefers to speak of “complexes of rules of speech” rather than “norms of speech.”

Regarding the “absence” of norms and rules at the individual level (unfilled gaps), Koch (2008) argues that there is no specific type of rule at the discourse level, since speakers only apply elocutionary rules (at the universal level), idiomatic rules (at the historical level of particular languages), and discourse rules (at the historical level of the discourse tradition). In the aforementioned work of 2021 [1997], Koch underscores that it is not possible, at this level of language, to assign any kind of rule or norm, since

a speaker would not follow a rule only once, as Wittgenstein had already clarified as quoted by the author (2008, p. 365).

Koch's (2021) proposal, as we have seen, has the merit of clarifying the relationship between the history of language and the history of texts. The model is grounded in the thesis that these two histories – the history of language and that of texts – permeate everything we say or produce, whether in the oral or written modality.

In other words, as Costa (2010, online) explains, “every text necessarily follows two traditions: the tradition of the language in which it was produced (Portuguese, Spanish, English, German, etc.) and the tradition of certain textual models (styles, textual genres, formulas, among others).” Let us discuss Koch's model in more detail.

A few more words about Koch's theoretical model

In the founding text that we have been discussing, Koch (2021) brings to the fore other aspects that are closely intertwined with the notion of discourse tradition and that serve to better understand it.

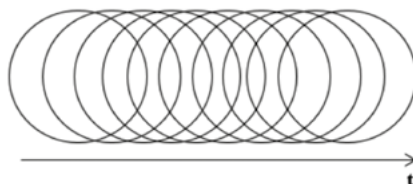
In relation to the use of the term “discourse genres” by discourse traditions, Koch draws attention to the fact that the term is taken as “entities of completely different nature” (2021, p. 374), considering that they can be classified on the basis of traits, firstly, as oral vs written, dialogical vs monological, referential vs appealing, descriptive vs argumentative, and secondly, as newspaper reports, interviews, sonnets, lectures, among others. In the first classification, what is taken into account are universal constants, fundamental to the rules of speech; in the second case, it is the historical traditions carried by specific cultural groups. In this case, we refer to discourse traditions, and, for this reason, the Romanist favours the use of the term “discourse tradition” for the rules of discourse, precisely because it has this more accentuated historical dimension.

The concept is also useful when dealing with orality and literacy, to distinguish the particularities of DT in relation to the *medium* (phonic vs. graphic) and the discourse conception (immediacy vs. communicative distance). Taking these two aspects into account - medium and discourse conception, distinctions can be made, for example, between the talk show (phonic), the magazine interview (obtained phonetically and then recorded graphically) and the TV news (fixed graphically and then realised phonetically by reading aloud). This leads to the conclusion that every DT has a defining feature both from a medial point of view and from the point of view of discourse conception, and that one can be independent of the other, since a defence brief, for example, even if it is read out to the public present in that communicative context, will still be a defence brief, produced graphically. In relation to the discourse conception, there are no dichotomous positions between one pole and the other; what we have, in fact,

is a continuum of immediacy and communicative distance, and in this sense we can determine a point on this *continuum* where a DT can be allocated¹⁴.

By drawing attention to the “tradition” part of the term discourse traditions, Koch reinforces the conservative, traditional nature of the term, given the high degree of stability with which traditions pass through time, but he also emphasises its variable aspect, since we are dealing with historically modifiable phenomena. Considering this tendency to change, it is easy to see that a DT, by adapting to new contingencies, changes over time. In the process, it consequently distances itself from its original manifestations. To explain this distancing and better understand the diachronic identity of a DT, here understood as a textual genre, Koch says it is relevant to draw on Wittgenstein’s concept of “family resemblance”¹⁵ and to Givón’s (1986)¹⁶ representation and then reproduces the following diagram:

Figure 1 – Graphic representation of the process of conservation and change in discourse traditions



Source: Koch (2021, p. 383)

The diagram represents the successive changes that genres go through over time (t). It is important to remember that although genres distance themselves from their first manifestations over time, they are similar to them, hence the relevance of Wittgenstein’s concept. Although Koch points out that an overlapping model such as the one proposed does not account for all the complexity involved in the discourse-traditional dynamic, he uses this diagram to develop others that will represent the tension between conservation and innovation. The tension arises precisely because some constituent elements remain for some time in the new traditions even though they no longer perform any function in relation to the communicative purpose; these dysfunctional elements tend, sooner or later, to disappear or, in certain circumstances, to be aestheticised. As an example

¹⁴ Marcuschi (2001), in explaining the relationship between speech and writing, also defends, based on Koch and Oesterreicher (1990), the idea of a continuum through which the texts/genres of each modality can be distinguished and correlated.

¹⁵ For more on family resemblance, see Wittgenstein, L. ([1953]1999). *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by José Carlos Bruni. Nova Cultural (Coleção Os Pensadores: Wittgenstein), particularly the passage from §66 to §68.

¹⁶ Givón, T. (1986). Prototypes: between Plato and Wittgenstein. In: Craig, C. (Ed.). *Noun Classes and Categorisation*. Benjamins, p. 77-102. Koch (2021, p. 382-383) also reproduces Strube’s (1989) scheme, but prefers Givón’s because he recognises that, in a way, the latter’s diagram points to the historical mutability and dynamics of discourse traditions.

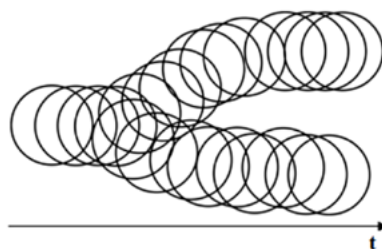
of this process of aestheticisation, Koch explains that in oral societies, in poetic DT, which used assonance/rhyme/rhythm as a way of memorising poetry, with the spread of writing, these tonal and rhythmic qualities lose their “‘technical’ relevance for memorisation” and “become purely aesthetic characteristics of poetry” (2021, p. 389).

The German Romanist upholds the principle that “discourse traditions are, essentially, just one type of the multifaceted cultural traditions of human beings” (Koch, 2021, p. 384), much like musical, culinary, sporting, or religious traditions. This view is grounded in the idea that discourse traditions, like all cultural traditions, are in a constant process of change. With each new challenge, be it cultural, economic, political, or even technological, new communicative needs emerge. Established traditions often prove insufficient to fully meet these demands, which in turn drives both the transformation of existing traditions and the emergence of new ones. These new traditions never arise from nothing; they are always connected to pre-existing, conventionalised ones.

Intrigued by the way in which the new and the innovative manifest themselves in DT, Koch, always drawing parallels between a cultural tradition and a specifically discourse tradition¹⁷, demonstrates that innovation occurs through three distinct processes: differentiation, mixing and convergence.

With regard to the process of differentiation, considered a “typical process of innovation of cultural traditions” (p. 390), with specific reference to discourse traditionality, the example given is that of the *avviso* (which arose from the printing of handwritten newsletters), which led to the emergence, on the one hand, in the journalistic sphere, of genres that led to newspaper news; and, on the other, in a process of literarisation, of the epistolary novel. To represent this process graphically, Koch proposes the following diagram.

Figure 2 – Graphical representation of the process of differentiation between discourse traditions



Source: Koch (2021, p. 390)

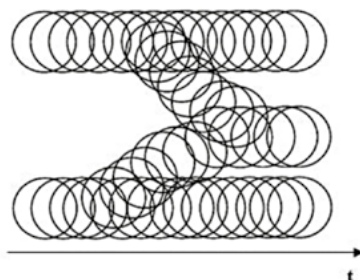
At the origin, we would have the *avviso*, which would have contributed to the emergence of distinct DT: at the top, the newspaper report, and at the bottom, the

¹⁷ For the sake of space and the focus of this article, we will only refer to the discourse traditions themselves.

epistolary novel. These two genres, i.e., these two DTs, would thus be innovations resulting from the process of differentiation.

Regarding the process of mixing, Koch points out that the differentiation of cultural traditions occurs concomitantly with the process of mixing traditions. To illustrate this movement, the author turns to the public political discourse that emerged in northern and central Italy in the 13th century, the *arenga*. Since there was no existing tradition in the societies of that time on which this new need for discursive practice could be based, the tendency was to blend it with other somewhat similar practices. Thus, the *arenga* resulted from a combination of the official letter, the public speech, and the sermon, and in this process, it underwent a transposition of discursive rules, possibly derived from the traditions that gave rise to it. The following is a graphic representation of this process:

Figure 3 – Graphical representation of the process of mixing discourse traditions

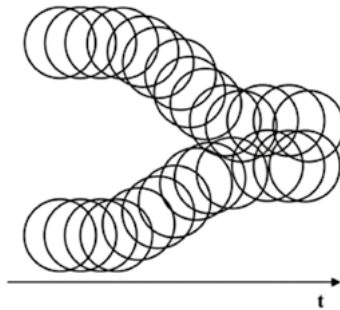


Source: Koch (2021, p. 391)

The *arenga*, a public political speech from 13th-century Italy, emerged, as we have seen, from constitutive elements of other traditions – namely, the official letter and the public speech, to which the sermon was added. The sermon was the only established public tradition at the time; although not political in nature, it was already consolidated. All three are represented by the spirals that intertwine.

The process of convergence, on the other hand, refers to the likelihood of different cultural traditions following similar developments and, from a certain point onwards, sharing the same path of development. To illustrate this, Koch cites printed newspapers and magazines, which are currently moving more and more towards what is known as infotainment, i.e., the convergence of journalistic and entertainment information. To represent this process, he presents this diagram:

Figure 4 – Graphic representation of the process of convergence between discourse traditions



Source: Koch (2021, p. 393)

As we have seen, printed newspapers and magazines, represented by two distinct spirals, were gradually brought closer together over time due to new demands, ultimately giving rise to a new practice: infotainment.

This process that results in new DT, called innovation by Koch, had already received attention from Bakhtin ([1979]2016), who treated it as re-elaboration. The Russian philosopher, attentive to the extreme heterogeneity of discourse genres, distinguishes between primary (simple) and secondary (complex)¹⁸ genres and postulates that secondary genres, created in the conditions of more complex social interaction, that is, more developed and organised, in their process of formation, “incorporate and rework various primary (simple) genres, which were formed in the conditions of immediate discursive communication” (Bakhtin, 2016, p. 15). Nevertheless, it was not just Bakhtin who emphasised the reworking of genres. Bronckart (1999), recognising the historical and adaptive nature of textual productions, points out that “some genres tend to disappear [...], but can sometimes reappear in partially different forms; some genres change [...]; new genres appear [...]; in short, genres are in perpetual movement” (p. 73-74).

Focusing on the process of re-elaboration of genres¹⁹ and anchored in Bakhtinian propositions, Zavam (2009, 2012) expands the notion of re-elaboration and creates an operational typology to distinguish the different ways in which the phenomenon occurs, establishing four categories. Thus, in a first instance, a distinction is made between ‘creative re-elaboration’ and ‘innovative re-elaboration’.

¹⁸ On this crucial distinction in Bakhtin, see Faraco, 2003.

¹⁹ In his 2009 work, Zavam based himself on Maria Ermantina Galvão Pereira’s translation of “*Estética da criação verbal*” (1992, 1st edition), directly from French, in which the term used is “transmutation”. In the 2012 text, even though he used Paulo Bezerra’s translation of the Russian original (2011), which uses the term “re-elaboration”, Zavam continues to use “transmutation”, even though he admits that the term used by Paulo Bezerra is more appropriate because, given what is covered in the text, it remains faithful to the proposal to categorise the phenomenon as it was conceived. Here we have opted for the more appropriate term, precisely because it emphasises the role of the subjects in this process.

“Creative re-elaboration” refers to the emergence of a new genre, always derived from a pre-existing one, as occurred, for example, with the blog²⁰. ‘Innovative re-elaboration’ stems from the inherent capacity of every genre to renew itself without giving rise to a new genre, as we can observe in the everyday transformations that occur within genres. In the second instance, the distinction would be between “external re-elaboration” and “internal re-elaboration”, both resulting from “innovative re-elaboration”. The first – external, also understood as “intergeneric re-elaboration”²¹ – would be seen when there is the insertion of one genre into another, as, for example, in the case of a travel agency advertisement that inserts a postcard into its text. The second – internal, also interpreted as “intrageneric re-elaboration”, occurs not because of the insertion of another genre, but because of contingencies that condition and drive innovation, for example, when a genre migrates to the digital context and adjusts to these new communicative demands. The change of environment or media, communicative purpose, field of action, era, style, among other factors, reflect and refract the dynamics of social interactions, thereby fostering the process of re-elaboration.

Although Koch (2021) did not elaborate on the process of innovation nor clarify what he referred to as ‘purely internal differentiation’ when discussing the differentiation of cultural traditions (p. 391), the value of his contribution to studies on DT is unquestionably significant. This is true both for indicating, within the Coserian framework, the locus from which discursive traditions should, in his view, be recognised, and for presenting them as a specific area within linguistic investigation. As for the locus, it is worth noting that this is not a consensual position among German Romanists. Kabatek (2021), for instance, prefers to remain faithful to Coseriu’s view and therefore considers, as the Romanian master did, that discursive traditions belong to the individual level (and not the historical one)²². Beyond these points, it is also noteworthy that Koch, in his proposal, underscores the notion that discursive traditions are cultural traditions, since, as we know, it is within the realm of culture – regardless of the many ways it may be understood – that the emergence, preservation, and transformation of such linguistic-discursive structures are brought about.

Revisiting Coseriu’s propositions on discourse traditions

Koch’s (1997) text may give the impression that Coseriu didn’t recognise DT, even though the text explicitly mentions both the tripartite scheme of language levels proposed by the Romanian master and what each of these levels comprises. Therefore,

²⁰ On the process of creating and stabilising the blog, see Komesu (2004) and Miller (2012).

²¹ This same phenomenon, which has been studied by other linguists, has been called *hybridisation* by Marcuschi (2002); *superposition* by Alves Filho (2005); and *intergeneric intertextuality* by Koch, Bentes and Cavalcante (2007), among others. Bakhtin, in another work (2015), treated it as “intercalation of genres”.

²² This divergence was addressed by Zavam (2009), further substantiated by Kabatek (2021) and more recently by López Serena (2023).

to dispel this possible misconception, in this section we present excerpts from some of the works in which Coseriu not only considers DT but also distinguishes them from linguistic traditions²³.

In a 1957 text, *El problema de la corrección idiomática*, edited by Kabatek and Meisterfeld²⁴, Coseriu draws attention to the fact that, in addition to knowing how to speak in general and how to speak a particular language, there is also knowing how to speak in a particular circumstance, that is, a kind of knowledge that enables a speaker to adapt their speech project to the person they are speaking to, at a specific moment and in a specific environment. In this sense, he argues that there are “texts” such as sayings, proverbs, greeting formulas, among others, which, although transmitted through idiomatic tradition, cannot, considering their structure, be regarded as a “fact of language.” In these cases, we are not dealing with idiomatic technique, but with textual traditions, that is, a “historical dimension of texts that is manifested in the existence of more or less fixed texts” (Loureda Lamas, 2007, p. 56). Thus, the reasons that would justify, for example, the use of greeting formulas such as *Boa noite!* or *Buenas noches* – rather than “noite boa” or “noche(s) buena(s)” – would not stem from idiomatic technique, but from textual tradition. Further on, distinguishing between the “historicity of the linguistic instrument” and the “historicity of the discourses produced through this instrument,” Coseriu cites the example of the sonnet which, when written in Spanish, applies the linguistic technique of that language, which in turn has its own history as such a technique. However, what makes the sonnet a fact of the Spanish language is precisely its belonging to a specific tradition that “is not linked to any particular language and has its own historicity” (p. 14) – in this case, the tradition of the sonnet text.

In the work already mentioned here, *Lições de Linguística Geral* (Lessons in General Linguistics), Coseriu, when looking more closely at the historical plane of language (see Table 1 – General structure of language), states that this plane of historically determined technical traditions “contains not only linguistic facts, but also other traditions related to ‘things’, that is, to the extralinguistic world” (1980, p. 102). Among several examples, he cites the expression “é um cavalo” (“it’s a horse”), which, in Portuguese, when addressed to a person, particularly in the south of Brazil, means that this person is skillful and competent in their work; in Spanish (“es um caballo”), on the other hand, it denotes someone who is rude and stupid. He goes on to explain that this difference in the meanings attributed to the term “horse” in Portuguese and Spanish does not depend on the linguistic relations themselves, because “such ideas and opinions constitute traditions which, in general, do not coincide with the linguistic ones, because they can have boundaries that are either broader or narrower than a given linguistic community” (p. 103).

²³ Zavam (2009), Costa (2010) and Kabatek (2021) also emphasise that the concept of discursive traditions had already been addressed by Coseriu.

²⁴ See https://coseriu.ch/wp-content/uploads/publications_coseriu/coseriu336b.pdf.

In a 1975 manuscript, *Hacia una lingüística integral*²⁵, Coseriu, when dealing specifically with the planes (levels) of language and the autonomy of the text plane (third level), states that discourse traditions (text, individual level) are not necessarily idiomatic traditions (historical level). For the linguist, “texts not only have idiomatic traditions, but their own traditions as texts” (Coseriu, 1975, p. 30). He also points out that “texts not linked to idiomatic traditions have their own traditions as textual genres at various levels, from metrical forms to literary genres, and are nothing more than textual traditions.” (p. 31). Among the examples, he cites the genres of tragedy, soap opera, among others, “which are traditions that refer to texts, not idiomatic traditions, because they can be realised in any language” (p. 31).

In the work *Linguistic Competence: elements of speaking theory*²⁶, Coseriu, establishing a dialogue with Chomsky’s generativism, develops a theory of linguistic competence – or the theory of linguistic knowledge, as he prefers to call it – and over the course of more than three hundred pages he makes arguments that move further and further away from what Chomsky’s approach conceived of as competence. The Romanian linguist, unlike the generativists, does not start from biological principles to explain this intuitive knowledge that governs the interactions in which individuals engage, but from the conception that the knowledge that speakers use when they speak is the result of creative linguistic activity. Linguistic competence, taken as culture-dependent knowledge or technique, is related to the three levels we have already mentioned: speaking in general, concrete language and text or discourse (see Table 1 – General structure of language). In this sense, Coseriu distinguishes three competences: general linguistic competence, particular linguistic competence and textual or discursive competence. These three competences, although each may operate autonomously from the others, function simultaneously in the act of speaking, so that the speaker, in concrete communication situations and through creative activity, always produces new texts/discourses.

When producing texts, speakers draw not only on their knowledge of how the language itself works, but above all on their knowledge of how texts work. Thus, when meeting someone they know in the morning, a speaker would say morning greetings specific to their language, such as *Good morning!* in English, or *Guten Tag!* in German, revealing that texts have their own traditions. Thus, “the fact that precisely *Guten Tag!* [or *Good morning!*], and not another expression, is used as a greeting formula **is a textual tradition and not a particular linguistic tradition**, although it is normal for all members of the linguistic community to know this expression” (Coseriu, 1992, p. 194 - emphasis added).

²⁵ This manuscript was translated by professor Clemilton Lopes Pinheiro, from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, and is in the negotiation phase for its publication.

²⁶ This work, whose original title is *Sprachkompetenz. Grundzüge der Theorie des Sprechens*, was published in 1998 as the result of a course Coseriu taught at the University of Tübingen during the first half of 1983/84 and the second half of 1984/85. The edition we are referring to is the 1992 Spanish version.

Here are some excerpts in which Coseriu discusses DT and makes it clear that they are not to be confused with linguistic or idiomatic traditions²⁷. Whereas the latter are part of the historical level and are related to particular linguistic competence, the former are part of the individual (discourse) level, unlike Koch's view (2021), and are related to textual or discursive competence.

Reviewing definitions and exemplifying the concept

Although the DT model has been the focus of studies by various researchers, as we have already pointed out, the concept, that is, the definition of the term, is not always presented in such studies, or when it is, it is almost always that of Kabatek (2005). To clarify what is meant by DT, even though its interpretation is far from uniform, as Kabatek (2015) notes, we present below some conceptualisations from different authors, along with a few illustrative examples.

Österreicher, in the aforementioned 1997 article, defined discourse traditions as “normative and conventionalised models of linguistic transmission of meaning, which regulate the production and reception of discourses”²⁸ (p. 20). In this sense, the production and comprehension of any text, whether oral or written, necessarily mobilises both the rules of language, as a historically determined technique, and as traditionally conventionalised discursive forms (discourse traditions).

With the aim of clarifying some of the misconceptions surrounding what has come to be called “discourse traditions”, as well as broadening the concept so that it is not restricted to more complex traditions – namely, textual genres – and can thus be applied to other text traditions, Kabatek (2005), after surveying some concepts related to the term's conception, arrives at the following definition, the one most frequently cited in works on the subject:

By Discourse Tradition (DT) we mean the repetition of a text or textual form or a particular way of writing or speaking that acquires its own sign value (and is therefore signifiable). It can be formed in relation to any purpose of expression or with any element of content whose repetition establishes a bond of actualisation and tradition, in other words, any relationship that can be established semiotically between two elements of tradition (acts of enunciation or referential elements) that evoke a certain textual form or certain linguistic elements used (Kabatek, 2005, p. 159).

²⁷ Considering Coseriu's enormous output (cf. Pinheiro, 2018), there will certainly be other passages, which have not been mentioned here, in which the linguist discusses the concept.

²⁸ In the original: “normative, die Diskursproduktion und Diskursrezeption steuende, konventionalisierte Muster der sprachlichen Sinnvermittlung”.

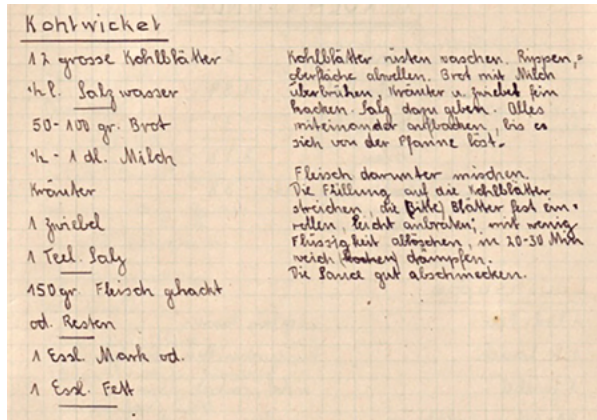
In a 2012 text, seeking to clarify the delimitation between the concepts of DT and genre and thus avoid possible confusion between the two, Kabatek points out that a DT can be a specific formula, as well as a particular form, both combined within a universe of discourse. To illustrate, he states that “a greeting formula such as dear friend can be part of the letter form, which can be part of the everyday universe.” (Kabatek, 2012, p. 583). Here again, we see that a DT comprises both a textual genre and different parts of that genre, as we will see with examples later on. In this sense, he once again draws attention to the “principle of traditional compositionality”, which would explain the fact that a text can “correspond to a whole series of co-present traditions at the same time” (p. 596).

Longhin (2014), in a work dedicated not only to the concept and history but also to the process of acquiring DT, uses the definitions of Österreicher (1997) and Kabatek (2005) to assume that it is a question of “traditional, socio-historically conventionalised linguistic models that condition the selection and combination of linguistic elements, thus governing the production and reception of discourse or text” (Longhin, 2014, p. 22) and recognises that, as it is a broad concept, it encompasses everything from genres to speech acts. The notion thus emphasises not only the linguistic but also the “conventional, the ritual, the repeatable” (p. 22).

We could cite other works that present the concept of DT, but all of them in one way or another either reproduce the definitions already presented or reformulate them, while maintaining the same meaning, which leads us, in summary, to postulate that whenever faced with a communicative purpose, the speaker will necessarily model their discourse in accordance with what has already been said, thus establishing a relationship between the present and the tradition. Likewise, the interlocutor will be guided by these textual traditions when taking part in the interaction process.

We want to draw attention to the fact that these historically conventionalised “patterns” of text production/reception are updated in discourses, in situations of interaction, in different dimensions: i) genres (for example, a cooking recipe, when the communicative purpose is to teach how to prepare a dish; in this case, we are dealing with the historicity of the genre); ii) compositional structure (the rhetorical organization of the recipe, the sonnet, the meme, etc.); iii) text types (the predominance of a specific textual sequence—narrative, argumentative, descriptive, etc.); iv) of styles (Baroque, Mannerism; technical, scientific, etc.); v) of linguistic aspects (for example, the use of tenses/moods in certain genres). By way of illustration, let us see how DT can be seen in each of these dimensions, considering the following text.

Figura 5 – Rezept für gefüllten ganzen Kohl



Source: <https://doazmol-rezepte.ch/archive/5484>

Even if we do not speak German, we can still identify the genre to which the reproduced text belongs. There is no doubt that we recognize it as a culinary recipe (first dimension). But why is that? Because we identify historically conventionalized constitutive elements: the macrostructure - ingredients and method of preparation (second dimension); the presumably injunctive sequences (third dimension); the expected use of language closer to colloquial speech (fourth dimension); the use of numerals and measurements; and the assumed use of the imperative mood (fifth dimension). The fact that recipes are commonly produced following these traditional elements does not imply that innovation is impossible. As previously noted, there is a constant tension between conservation and innovation that inexorably shapes discursive traditions (DTs). Thus, both recurring and modified elements may coexist within the same text. Kabatek (2005) reminds us that both repetition and evocation are defining features of discursive traditions. In a concrete communicative situation, such as someone wanting to share a recipe with another person, other similar situations will inevitably be evoked, in which recipes have previously been shared, and a new recipe will be produced, though in repetition with regard to those evoked. Evocation and repetition therefore operate concomitantly in the updating of discursive traditions.

It is worth recalling, and we emphasize this point, that textual traditions do not condition only texts from a distant past, but also those produced in the present day. Let us consider the following example.

Figure 6 – Example of a tweet²⁹



Source: <https://todateen.com.br/noticias/tweets-engracados-dos-famosos.phtml>

We readily recognise, in the first dimension, the genre “tweet” (or “post”), as well as, in the 2nd dimension, the compositional structure, formed by the photo and name of the profile owner (in this case, Anitta, a Brazilian singer (re)known (inter)nationally), the short text (a certain number of characters) and other information that makes up the textual whole (retweets [reposts], likes, followers); in the 3rd dimension, (the simulation of) a dialogue sequence; in the 4th dimension, the traits of communicative immediacy; in the 5th dimension, the use of prosodic resources (syllable lengthening), among others.

As we can see, DT is always not only refracting and reflecting, but also adjusting to communicative demands. As Koch (2021, p. 379) observes, “when changes begin to occur in the political, economic, cultural, religious, and other domains, new communicative needs arise. These new needs, in turn, motivate the emergence of new discursive traditions.”

The theoretical and methodological perspective of discursive traditions, as we have seen, has proven to be highly relevant in studies on language and textual variation and change. Beyond these already well-established areas, we have observed the emergence of research that connects DT with writing acquisition and with education. This is the topic we take up as we move toward the conclusion of our discussion.

Taking new paths and drawing a conclusion

By making it possible to identify traditional elements in texts, as well as the role they play in these texts and in their historicity, we can point to other possibilities for the DT model. Firstly, the model has proven to be productive for studies (on the acquisition) of writing, as mentioned above. We can cite Longhin-Tomazi (2011), who, in a longitudinal study, analysed the written productions of two children during

²⁹ We’ve kept the term “tweet” because it’s the best-known term for messages exchanged on the social network Twitter, which, after being bought by Elon Musk, became X. The messages, in turn, as determined by the site’s new owner, are no longer “tweets” and are now called “posts”. See article published on the Estado de Minas newspaper website: https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/tecnologia/2023/08/09/interna_tecnologia,1543222/elon-musk-troca-nomenclatura-do-x-antigo-twitter.shtml

the first four years of primary school and found that the acquisition of writing can be better understood when junction schemes are considered as a key phenomenon for the apprehension of discourse traditions. Lopes-Damásio (2020), on the other hand, investigated examples of two genres – experience report and opinion letter – produced by students in the final years of primary school, and identified linguistic-discursive relationships between junction mechanisms and discursive traditions.

Secondly, the applicability of the model has extended to language teaching, specifically, in our case, the teaching of Portuguese. However, despite the advances of this model in various studies – which certainly have potential implications for teaching – there remains a significant path to travel before these traditional modes of speaking or writing, recognized in the constitution of texts/genres, can be fully incorporated as objects of instruction and thus reach the classroom. Aware of this potential, teacher-researchers have been developing guidelines aimed at including the historicity of texts within Portuguese language teaching practices, particularly those focusing on textual genres, although not limited to these discursive artifacts, as other dimensions may also be addressed, as demonstrated in the previous section. Furthermore, it is always important to remember that, although every genre is a discursive tradition, not every discursive tradition constitutes a genre. For example, the expression “*nesses termos, pede deferimento*” (“in these terms, approval is requested”) is widely recognized as part of legal petitions. This expression is a discursive tradition, but it is not a genre; the genre, in this case, is the petition.

Some (still few, it is true) studies that invest in this relationship between the DT paradigm and teaching are already emerging in postgraduate programmes, both academic and professional³⁰. In the professional context, specifically in the Professional Master’s program in Letters (ProFLetras), research grounded in the paradigm of discursive traditions has increasingly employed the model of didactic sequences by Dolz, Noverraz, and Schneuwly (2004), and more recently, the proposal of didactic itineraries as presented by Dolz, Lima, and Zani (2020), to design activities aimed at improving teaching practices. As examples, we cite the dissertation by Santos (2019), which adopts a socio-historical approach to the print advert genre to offer, through a didactic sequence, comprehension activities focused on social transformations that influence the language and the genre in question; and that by Taura (2019), who investigates the relationship between discursive tradition and linguistic variation through the application of a sequence of activities designed to support the production of the personal letter genre by 6th-grade primary school students in urban and rural contexts, with the purpose of fostering a new perspective on children’s written production. In the academic field, we also highlight the dissertation by Santana (2022), which conducts a linguistic-discursive analysis of junction mechanisms comparing narrative and argumentative discursive traditions produced by 7th-grade students, and the thesis by Rodrigues (2023), which explores the historicity of the regulated debate genre within

³⁰ See the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) and/or the Capes Catalogue of Theses and Dissertations (<https://bdtd.ibict.br/vufind/>).

a didactic itinerary proposed to develop competencies and skills intended to enhance performance in both comprehension and production of oral genres.

In addition to the research, some articles are also beginning to highlight the productivity between the concept of DT and teaching, such as Luna and Lima (2021), who, based on the fact that little space is given to the historicity of texts and consequently to DT in Portuguese language teaching, suggest didactic possibilities for the classroom. Zavam and Dolz (2023) propose a didactic itinerary for the podcast storytelling genre, exploring aspects linked to the historicity of the genre and the retextualisation from written to oral. All these studies lead us to reaffirm that there is no doubt about the relevance and expansion of the DT model.

But what, in fact, does the concept bring that is new? What does it add to the notions of “textual genre” or “text type”? According to Aschenberg (2003), the term reveals its contribution to linguistic studies (both diachronic and synchronic) by emphasizing the historicity of texts – a feature that does not pertain to the specific historical context of an individual text, but rather to the conventionality and regularity that characterize the concrete text as a product of the application of certain media and conceptual patterns, situating it within a historical genre and, furthermore, within a discursive universe. Moreover, it has the capacity to engage in dialogue with other theoretical perspectives, as it does not claim to be a conclusive model for understanding the vast and numerous phenomena of language, but rather a possibility for dialogue, always aiming at a deeper understanding of the diverse language practices in which individuals are involved, whether in a distant past or a more recent one.

ZAVAM, Aurea; DOLZ, Joaquim. *Tradições Discursivas: do surgimento à produtividade de um paradigma*. Alfa, São Paulo, v. 69, 2025.

- **RESUMO:** *Este artigo parte do conceito de tradição discursiva, retomando seu surgimento, para discutir sua produtividade, tanto para os estudos que buscam pesquisar não só a história das línguas como a dos textos, quanto para os que lançam olhar investigativo sobre traços de permanência e vestígios de mudança em textos de sincronias mais recentes. Para tanto, dialoga com textos fundadores do conceito, notadamente os gestados no seio da romanística alemã, expondo, assim, seu desenho teórico, e ainda aponta o espraiamento de tal conceito, perscrutando seu alcance entre diferentes pesquisadores e suas possibilidades de análise nos estudos sobre gêneros textuais. O exercício teórico acentua a significativa contribuição de Eugenio Coseriu para o estabelecimento do paradigma das tradições discursivas e revela a sua legitimidade tanto para o estudo de fenômenos linguístico-textuais quanto para o ensino de língua portuguesa, destacado ao final da discussão. Espera-se que os trabalhos retomados e as reflexões levantadas possam contribuir para levar essa corrente de estudos além dos espaços já alcançados de modo a instigar novas pesquisas e estabelecer novos diálogos.*
- **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Historicidade dos textos; Mudança e permanência nos gêneros; Ensino de Língua Portuguesa.*

Author Contributions (according to the CRediT taxonomy)

Aurea Zavam: Conceptualization; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Visualization; Writing – original draft.

Joaquim Dolz: Conceptualization; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Visualization; Writing – original draft.

Data Availability Statement

All datasets supporting the findings of this study have been published within the article itself.

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