

THE CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE IN USE WHEN DEVELOPING ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING PORTUGUESE TO FOREIGNERS

A MATERIALIZAÇÃO DO CONCEITO DE LÍNGUA EM USO NA PRODUÇÃO DE ATIVIDADES PARA O ENSINO DE PORTUGUÊS PARA ESTRANGEIROS

LA MATERIALIZACIÓN DEL CONCEPTO DE LENGUA EN USO EN LA PRODUCCIÓN DE ACTIVIDADES PARA LA ENSEÑANZA DE PORTUGUÉS A EXTRANJEROS

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ABSTRACT: *A demand of teachers of Portuguese as a foreign language, when developing or adapting activities and teaching materials that suit the concept of language as a social practice, is to materialize the theoretical principles that underlie this language perspective in teaching activities, so that it can meet learning expectations and provide the students with meaningful language uses. That said, this article aims to illustrate and explain how the concept of language in use can be transposed in the production/adaptation of teaching activities or in teaching materials, through comparisons drawn from a Master's thesis that aimed at developing teaching material of Portuguese for foreigners in a university context. As a result, it will be presented a checklist with the main characteristics to be observed in this process, which can contribute to the teacher's training and practice, as well as to those who want to understand how to materialize this concept in teaching activities.*

KEYWORDS: *Language in use. Portuguese for speakers of other languages. Development of teaching materials.*

RESUMO: Uma necessidade real de professores de português para estrangeiros, ao produzirem ou adaptarem atividades e materiais didáticos que se adequem a uma visão de língua como prática social, é materializar, nas atividades, o conceito e seus princípios, de modo que atenda às expectativas de aprendizagem, promovendo um uso de língua significativo para o aluno. Dito isso, este visa a ilustrar e explicitar como o conceito de língua em uso pode ser transposto na produção/adaptação de atividades ou materiais didáticos, por meio de comparações retiradas de um trabalho de mestrado que visou à elaboração de um material didático de português para estrangeiros em contexto universitário. Como resultado, será apresentado um checklist com as principais características a serem observadas nesse processo, contribuindo para a formação e para a prática pedagógica desse professor que quer entender na prática como materializar o conceito de língua em uso em atividades.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Língua em uso. Português para Falantes de Outras Línguas (PFOL). Produção de material didático.

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RESUMEN: *Una necesidad real de los profesores de portugués como lengua extranjera, al producir o adaptar actividades y materiales didácticos que se ajusten a una visión de la lengua como práctica social, es la de materializar, en las actividades, sus principios, de manera que se ajusten a las expectativas de aprendizaje, promoviendo un uso significativo de la lengua. Dicho esto, este artículo pretende ilustrar y explicar cómo el concepto de lengua en uso puede transponerse en la producción/adaptación de actividades o materiales didácticos, mediante comparaciones tomadas de un trabajo de maestría que tuvo como objetivo la elaboración de un material didáctico de portugués para extranjeros en contexto universitario. Como resultado, se presentará un checklist con las principales características a observar en este proceso, contribuyendo a la formación y a la práctica pedagógica del profesor que quiere entender en la práctica cómo materializar el concepto de lengua en uso en las actividades.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Lengua en uso. Portugués para hablantes de otras lenguas. Producción de material didáctico.*

Introduction

The production or adaptation of Portuguese teaching material for foreigners is subject to demands from specific groups and contexts and requires an attentive look at the learning needs and language use of the target audience. Therefore, the language concept adopted by the teacher, through activities, should be indicated from the student's learning expectations, contributing to the expected learning purposes. In this sense, concerning the teaching of Portuguese to foreigners, in which the objective is to promote language learning through significant linguistic-cultural interactions, the activities proposed in the material must converge with a conception of language as a social practice, since it is from this perspective that it is possible to understand the use of language not as a mere instrument of communication, but as a sociocultural phenomenon that makes the interaction and effective action in the world possible.

Starting from the intention of adopting a conception of language as a social practice in their pedagogical practice, the Portuguese teacher for foreigners, to meet specific demands of teaching, learning, and assessment sees himself in the need to produce or adapt educational resources or didactic materials since different teaching realities presuppose different pedagogical practices to achieve different goals, which, ultimately, requires that the didactic material be reconfigured as the students' learning needs are imposed. In other words, the host language Portuguese class, for example, has different learning demands from the heritage language Portuguese class, so that the teacher effectively acts in the (re)construction of his/her material.

However, in addition to the difficulty of finding teaching materials for Portuguese for foreigners in the market from a language approach as a social practice and an intercultural perspective, the teacher also finds it difficult to produce and adapt teaching materials for these purposes, having in view that

The production and choice of teaching materials is not an easy task, especially when we think of language as a social practice with all its complexity and dynamism. It is an ongoing exercise that involves putting aside theoretical constructs consolidated throughout the academic and professional life of language teachers (REIS, 2015, p. 72, our translation).

In this sense, Reis (2015) draws attention to the role of language understanding that the teacher should have on the conception of language for the desired learning purposes so that this understanding can contribute both to the “awakening of the inspiration of new ideas and teaching practices and to make the necessary adaptations based on reflection on the theoretical-methodological principles that guide the teaching-learning process” (REIS, 2015, p. 13, our translation). That way,

[...] everything that the teacher is and does must be consistent with the approach he decides to adopt, that he cannot just follow his teaching trajectory without originality or rely on textbooks that are offered to him without a reflective capacity and decision-making and creative force. It is necessary to create, it is necessary to adapt, it is necessary to change and reinvent (REIS, 2015, p. 40, our translation).

As a way of contributing to this demand from teachers, the Portal do Professor de Português Língua Estrangeira (PPPLE), a multilateral platform for the management of the Portuguese language, provides didactic resources for teaching and learning Portuguese, which can be adapted and updated depending on the needs of students, which brings up the concept of Open Educational Resource (OER), which are teaching, learning and research resources in the public domain or that have an intellectual property license that allows use and adaptation.

Therefore, the Portal's contribution is undeniable, given that it has didactic units developed by teachers, who, aware of the needs and realities of their students, tend to focus on less general content. In addition, the platform is based on the concept of language in use and under a pluricentric perspective of language, which allows transit through the different languages of the countries of the Lusophone community.

Once explained the reason why the Portuguese teacher for foreigners seeks to produce and adapt teaching materials and activities, this article presents itself intending to illustrate and explain how the concept of language in use can be transposed in the

production/adaptation of activities or activities. didactic materials, through comparisons taken from a master's work that aimed at the elaboration of teaching material for Portuguese for foreigners in a university context. With this, this work seeks to contribute to the training and pedagogical practice of this teacher who wants to understand in practice how to materialize the concept of language in use in the elaboration/adaptation of activities, be they the didactic units of the Portal, or any other resources of teaching and learning.

Therefore, this article will initially define the concept of language in use, so that, in the sequence, the underlying principles will be addressed, followed by examples and comparisons of activities, highlighting how the first versions of certain activities were modified during its elaboration, to adapt them to the conception of language in use, and, consequently, illustrating to the teacher the important steps for this. This movement of comparing activities is the result of the work developed within the scope of the Professional Master's program in Modern Foreign Languages (MEPLEM), by the State University of Londrina (UEL). The work entitled "Portuguese - Universities: Portuguese teaching material for foreigners in a university context" aimed to elaborate, present and describe teaching material for Portuguese for foreigners in a Brazilian university context, in addition to elucidating the theoretical principles that underlie its activities. Finally, a checklist is presented that summarizes some important characteristics that can constitute an activity based on the concept of language in use.

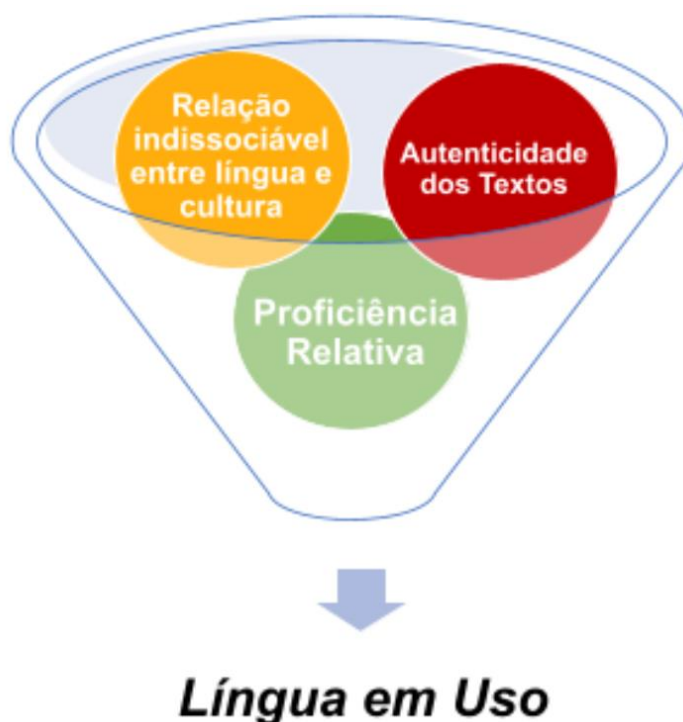
The concept of language in use, or of language as social practice, considers that language is an interactional encounter "crucially marked by the social world that surrounds it: by the institution, by culture and by history. This means that interactional events do not occur in a social vacuum.² In this view, meaning is constructed by the participants in the interaction in a dialogical way, so that language is marked by social interaction and language by a set of conventional and socio-historically situated uses. For language teaching, this conception is manifested when grammatical structures cease to have a leading role in learning and start to be at the service of use. In other words, "it is no longer about learning a language to appropriate it, but using it and, using it, learn it" (GERALDI, 2002, p. 53, our translation).

In this way, the language, for being dialogic, socio-historical, and culturally marked, manifests itself in an inseparable way from the culture, being presented to the students through the uses of authentic languages and texts that circulate in their space of coexistence and interaction, aiming at to reach higher levels of proficiency in Portuguese, with specific

²Available: <http://ppple.org/conversa>. Access: 21 June 2021.

purposes. This non-hierarchical relationship between these principles can be represented in the following figure:

Figure 1 – Representation of the Concept of Language in Use



Source: Author's collection

Therefore, from the figure, it is possible to perceive that the concept of language is in use: 1. Aims to subsidize social practice and interaction in society; 2. Prioritizes learning through contextualized, socially and culturally significant communication and interaction situations with well-defined purposes, which justifies the use of authentic texts that circulate in the student's life context; 3. Finally, it allows to shed light on the concept of relative proficiency, which implies considering, for language use and assessment, all the elements involved in the communication situation, such as who speaks, what speaks, to whom, when, where, why, and for what. The following figures were selected to elucidate the movement made by the author of the material to adjust the activities that were based, at first, on in a conception of language as a structure, to then bring them closer to a conception of language as social practice/language in use, observing the three principles already elucidated. Therefore, Figure 2 is the first example:

Figure 2 – First version of Activity 7 of the “Universidade em Foco” section

b) A partir das respostas apresentadas, formule perguntas adequadas.

<p>P: _____ _____ _____ _____</p> <p>R: Para realizar mobilidade internacional com bolsa, o aluno deve acompanhar os editais ofertados por diversas instituições. Para fazer mobilidade internacional sem bolsa, o aluno deve procurar a Assessoria de Relações Internacionais e Interinstitucionais (ARI).</p>	<p>P: _____ _____</p> <p>R: Trancamento de disciplina é o ato de trancar uma ou mais disciplinas durante um semestre. O trancamento de disciplinas é feito por meio do Portal do Ecampus e deve ser solicitado de acordo com calendário acadêmico.</p>
<p>P: _____ _____ _____</p> <p>R: A revalidação de diploma de graduação e pós-graduação deve ser feita diretamente na Plataforma Carolina Bori, a qualquer tempo. No entanto, o sistema somente dará prosseguimento caso haja vaga.</p>	<p>P: _____ _____</p> <p>R: Por meio do Portal Ecampus é possível obter diversos tipos de declarações. Situações mais específicas devem ser enviadas à Coordenação de Orientação Acadêmica.</p>
	<p>P: _____ _____</p> <p>R: A Solicitação de matrícula para curso de férias deverá ser realizada diretamente no Portal Ecampus.</p>

Fonte: proeg.ulam.edu.br/convenios.html. Adaptado.

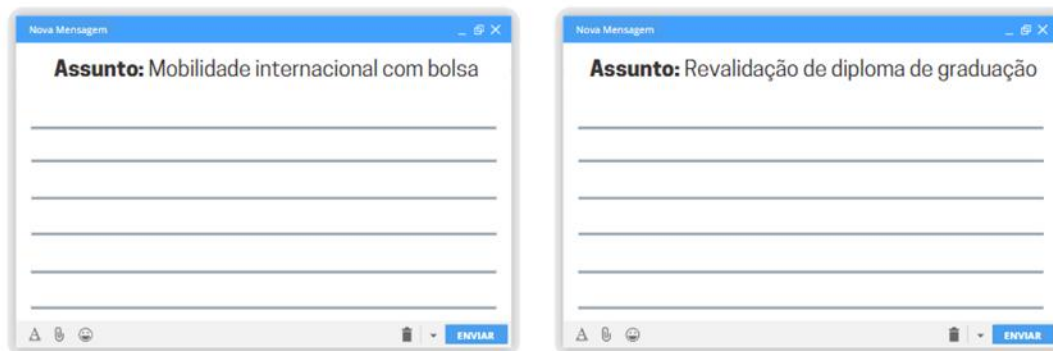
Source: Author's collection

In this activity, the command to be executed by the student is to formulate appropriate questions, according to previously presented answers. This activity does not consider the situation of language use, as it asks questions to be asked without a purpose and without a contextually marked interlocutor, which does not confer real use of communication, but a merely linguistic and decontextualized exercise, considering that, in everyday life, speakers do not unreasonably ask questions, an interlocutor, and without real communication support, based on pre-formulated answers.

The concept of language in use was materialized in the activity, which resulted in the activity in Figure 3:

Figure 3 – Final version of Activity 7 of the “Universidade em Foco” section

b) Você tem dúvidas quanto aos procedimentos necessários sobre as situações acadêmicas abaixo e não encontra essas respostas no FAQ da sua universidade no Brasil. Você entrará em contato com a secretaria por email e perguntará como e onde deverá executar essas ações.



Source: Author's collection

The activity in Figure 3 demonstrates that the student, to clarify doubts about academic procedures (purpose), due to his doubts about procedures regarding academic situations and since he cannot find their respective answers in the institution's FAQ (reason), you should ask questions about academic situations (social practice) to the Dean of your institution (interlocutor), by e-mail (support). Thus, it should not be the wording of the activity that requires the student to create a question, but the very use of the language contextualized and with a specific purpose. Therefore, it is a better contextualized and more meaningful activity for the student, which provides more subsidies so that he can perform it accurately.

Let us now look at another comparison, in which the role of the real support of interaction and the use of authentic materials in the elaboration of activities is explained:

Figure 4 – First version of the activity from the “Fazendo Acontecer” section

Um amigo do seu país está interessado em estudar na sua universidade do Brasil. Ele pergunta sobre o seu curso: duração, o que é exigido, horário das aulas e grau acadêmico. Em folha separada, dê um retorno respondendo-lhe.

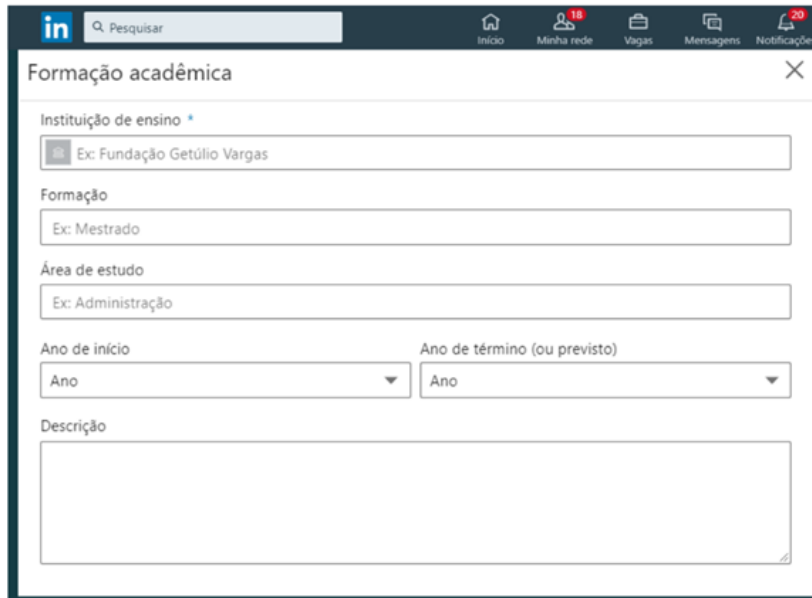
Source: Author's collection

This first version of the text production activity asks the student to write, on a separate sheet, an answer to the question presented, without defining, however, a genre or real support relevant to the proposed communication purposes, in which the message will materialize. In everyday life, speakers of the language do not communicate on a “separate sheet”, precisely

because it is not authentic support. In addition, some contextual aspects, such as where, when, how, and why, may not be well defined, which would create discursive gaps in communication, without the real use of language as a social practice. Therefore, as it does not present the mobilization of some principles of the aforementioned language conception, this activity was reformulated as shown in Figure 5:

Figure 5 – Final version of the activity from the “Fazendo Acontecer” section

Você está preenchendo seu perfil acadêmico no *LinkedIn*, rede social voltada para a área profissional. Complete o formulário com suas informações acadêmicas e, em seguida, descreva o seu curso e as funções da sua carreira.



Source: Author's collection

In this activity, the use of authentic material (LinkedIn social network) and real communication support (academic training filling page) make the purpose of the activity (talk about your training) more meaningful to your academic life. In addition, the support itself suggests who will be the communication agents (friends, companies, recruiters), as well as the contextual aspects of the interaction. This means that, from the authenticity of this text, the specific particularities of the genre will be considered, such as linguistic (lexicon and structure), discursive (cohesion and coherence) and contextual (interlocutor, motive, purpose). In this sense, the student is led to (re)know and make an “interpretation of what is said, when, by whom, to whom and for what purpose”³, calibrating the use of different linguistic-cultural registers and degrees of formality, which implies how the evaluation of this textual production

³ Available: <http://ppple.org/conversa>. Access: 21 June 2021.

will be carried out so that the student can be evaluated and can coherently adjust the use and nuances of the linguistic, discursive and contextual aspects with the language use situation in question. By doing so, the student will demonstrate proficiency in this usage situation. Thus, being proficient is

[...] being able to use language properly for social purposes (CLARK, 1996; COUNCIL of EUROPE, 2001) or being able to use “language to perform actions in the world” (BRASIL, 2011, p. 4). In this case, therefore, we are not talking about a single proficiency, but about “proficiencies” or different levels of proficiency, defined from the reflection on the nature of language in different situations of language use (PPLE, s/a, our translation).

This goes back to the concept of relative proficiency, which advocates that there is not a single proficiency, but distinct proficiencies that are interrelated. Unlike monolithic or absolute proficiency, which starts from a structuralist perspective, relative proficiency takes into account the different contexts and purposes of language uses. Thus, we have different “proficiencies” and different levels of proficiency, according to a given situation of use for a given purpose (MENDES; FURTOSO, 2018). Thus, instead of saying that the student is proficient in Portuguese, it is more appropriate to say that the student is proficient in Portuguese to perform a certain action with a certain purpose (SCARAMUCCI, 2000).

As for culture, the following activity (Figure 6), in questions a and b, explores vocabulary and concepts that circulate in the university context, promoting contact with linguistic-cultural aspects so that the student can know the university lifestyle in Brazil:

Figure 6 – First version of Activity 1 of the “Universidade em Foco” section

a) Ligue as palavras com as imagens.

TROTE	DOGÃO	ESQUENTA	XEROX	MIOJO	CHINELO
					

b) O texto aborda palavras comuns à vida do universitário. Complete o quadro de definição com as palavras apropriadas.

ABNT	O é a sigla para Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso. Ao final do curso de graduação, os alunos devem defender seu TCC.
TCC	O é o momento que os estudantes bebem em outro lugar antes de ir à uma festa.
DP	O é como informalmente alguns brasileiros se referem ao cachorro-quente ou hot dog.
ESQUENTA	O é uma brincadeira de boas-vindas a calouros. Às vezes, pode ser de mal gosto, como pedir dinheiro no farol, raspar os cabelos e banhar-se de tinta. Mais recentemente, essa atividade de recepção aos calouros tem se caracterizado como uma solidária.
TROTE	A é a sigla para Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas. Trabalhos acadêmicos e artigos científicos devem obedecer a essa norma.
DOGÃO	Na faculdade, o/a é o aluno no primeiro ano de faculdade. Também pode ser chamado informalmente de bixo ou bixete.
CALOURO/A é a abreviação de “dependência”, referindo-se à disciplina reprovada na faculdade.
VETERANO/A	Na faculdade, o/a é o aluno que já passou do segundo ano de faculdade.

Source: Author's collection

However, the activity, as proposed, would have the potential to better explore some cultural aspects of the university lifestyle, given the fact that it is about potentially diverse and rich experiences and ways of facing reality, which opened space for the addition of the following questions:

Figure 7 – Questions *c*, *d*, *e*, and *f* of Activity 1 of the “Universidade em Foco” section

- c) Você reconhece ou já presenciou algumas dessas situações do texto na universidade no Brasil? Quais?
- d) Você se identifica com alguma dessas situações? Quais?
- e) Quais dessas situações do texto mais chamou a sua atenção? Por quê?
- f) Quais dessas situações você concorda ou discorda? Por quê?

Source: Author's collection

These questions, in addition to helping to understand the concepts, reveal a potential to mobilize cultural aspects present in the university lifestyle. Once equipped with a linguistic-cultural framework, the student is invited to reflect on the different ways of seeing the world, so that he can see and understand different realities in a broader way, which also promotes a critical and enlightening dialogue about how and why things happen in that space and that way. Thus, language presents itself as a form of representation of perceptions and cultural values, and it is not possible to identify the limit between language and culture. Thus, from the perspective of language in use, language is not conceived only as an instrument of communication, but as a form of social and cultural identification. Therefore, this inseparability between language and culture can be understood as “a lens through which we see the reality that surrounds us” (MENDES, 2012, p. 25, our translation). That way,

[...] by structuring our thoughts and actions, it mediates between our experiences and that of the other with whom we interact socially through language, helping us to organize the world around us. In this sense, culture is not before or after language, nor one inside the other, they are in the same place (MENDES, 2012, p. 25, our translation).

Therefore, for Mendes (2010), and taking into account language as a social practice, language cannot be separated from the sociocultural aspects that surround its use, since, when using the language, the individual acts socioculturally through it. In addition, Mendes (2007) also highlights that, in the classroom, this perspective requires a dialogue between cultures through cultural contrasts (MENDES, 2007), aiming at the naturalization of estrangement, “in the search for a critical knowledge of the other and oneself, in the search for harmonious coexistence and respect for differences” (MAIOR; SOUZA, 2018, p. 99, our translation). In this sense, the questions that were added to the activity have the potential to not only explore cultural aspects of the Brazilian university lifestyle but also to promote the contrasting,

As a way of summarizing the movement made by the author in the search to materialize the principles that underlie the concept of language in use, a checklist will be presented below with a step by step of what the teacher can pay attention to when developing

or adapting activities or teaching materials for teaching purposes based on the perspective of the language in use:

- Create a relevant and meaningful task to the student's life (what).
- Explain a meaningful purpose for the task (what for).
- Explain a reason for performing the task (why).
- Explain the interlocutors involved in the task (who).
- Explain authentic support of interaction (where).
- Explain how the student should perform the task (how).
- Explore linguistic-cultural aspects to promote contrast, mutual respect, and critical-reflective opinion on cultural aspects and values.

This checklist summarizes some important characteristics that can constitute an activity based on the concept of language in use. It is worth mentioning, however, that it is the preconceived teaching and learning objectives that will indicate which of these aspects may be part of the activity to a greater or lesser degree. Furthermore, it is from the task, the purposes of language use, and the particularities of the genre that the linguistic, discursive, and contextual aspects will be defined, mobilized, and calibrated so that the student can adapt them to the situation of language use. In question, and the teacher evaluates it from the perspective of relative proficiency.

Final considerations

Meeting different teaching demands through the elaboration or adaptation of activities and didactic materials, considering the purposes and learning expectations of the class or student, is a challenge that demands from the teacher not only the recognition of the learning needs of the context but also the choice of which is the best language design that could facilitate the achievement of teaching and learning objectives. Therefore, the teacher must know what language concept he wants to adopt and how to adopt it, and, in doing so, ensure that its principles can be reflected in the teaching material used.

In case the teaching and learning objectives indicate the need to promote, within the teaching context, meaningful interactions and uses of language, the concept of language in use suits these purposes, so that the teacher needs to know the pillars that underlie it, as well as to materialize them when designing or adapting activities or teaching materials for the class. And it is in this sense that this article presents itself, in the search to contribute to the training and pedagogical practice of this teacher who wants to understand in practice how to materialize the concept of language in use, as well as its principles, in the

elaboration/adaptation of activities, either the adaptation of didactic materials from the market or the adaptation of PPPE didactic units.

The result is a checklist that briefly summarizes the main characteristics that the teacher of Portuguese for foreigners will be able to observe when designing or adapting activities based on the conception of the language in use, which also has the potential to help them in their pedagogical practice when trying to cross the student's learning needs with the ideal activity that fulfills those objectives.

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