# HUMOR AND TEACHING OF PORTUGUESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

# HUMOR E ENSINO DE PORTUGUÊS LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA EM CONTEXTO **MULTICULTURAL**

# HUMOR Y ENSEÑANZA DE PORTUGUÉS LENGUA EXTRANJERA EN CONTEXTO MULTICULTURAL

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**ABSTRACT**: Although humor is rarely present in classrooms, several studies confirm its benefits in the public and private spheres, demonstrating that this is an important resource that facilitates learning (PINA, 2014). Considering the difficulty of mastering humor in a foreign language, this paper addresses strategies designed to provide university students at the advanced level (C1) of Portuguese as a foreign language with autonomy in understanding humor, through exposure to a variety of oral and written texts with a strong multimodal component. The work carried out in a multicultural context allowed not only the appropriation of elements of the Portuguese and Lusophone cultures but also contact with different registers (formal and informal) and linguistic varieties (European and Brazilian Portuguese), enabling access to "a considerable degree of slang and idiomatic usage" (COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2001, p. 122) and the development of the critical awareness of learners.

**KEYWORDS**: Humor as a pedagogical tool. Humor and language teaching. Shared culture. Language and culture. Portuguese as a non-native language.

**RESUMO**: Apesar de o humor estar pouco presente nas salas de aula, existem vários estudos que confirmam os seus benefícios nas esferas pública e privada, demonstrando que este é um importante recurso facilitador da aprendizagem (PINA, 2014). Considerando a dificuldade de domínio do humor em língua estrangeira, neste artigo discutem-se estratégias concebidas para dotar de autonomia os estudantes universitários do nível avançado (C1) de português língua estrangeira na compreensão do humor, mediante a exposição a uma diversidade de textos orais e escritos com forte componente multimodal. O trabalho efetuado em contexto multicultural permitiu, não apenas a apropriação de elementos das culturas portuguesa e lusófona, mas também o contato com diferentes registros (formais e informais) e variedades linguísticas (português europeu e brasileiro), possibilitando o acesso a "um grau considerável de calão e expressões idiomáticas" (CONSELHO DA EUROPA, 2001, p. 110) e o desenvolvimento da consciência crítica dos aprendentes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Humor como ferramenta pedagógica. Humor e ensino de línguas. Cultura partilhada. Língua e cultura. Português língua não materna.

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RESUMEN: Si bien el humor rara vez está presente en las aulas, existen varios estudios que confirman sus beneficios en el ámbito público y privado, demostrando que este es un recurso importante que facilita el aprendizaje (PINA, 2014). Teniendo en cuenta la dificultad de dominar el humor en una lengua extranjera, este artículo analiza estrategias diseñadas para proporcionar a los estudiantes universitarios de nivel avanzado (C1) de portugués como lengua extranjera autonomía en la comprensión del humor, a través de la exposición a una variedad de textos orales y escritos con fuerte componente multimodal. Este trabajo realizado en un contexto multicultural permitió no solo la apropiación de elementos de las culturas portuguesa y lusófona, sino también el contacto con diferentes registros (formales e informales) y variedades lingüísticas (portugués europeo y brasileño), posibilitando el acceso a "un grado considerable de argot y de uso idiomático" (CONSEJO DE EUROPA, 2001, p. 119) y el desarrollo de la conciencia crítica de los alumnos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE**: Humor como herramienta pedagógica. Humor y enseñanza de idiomas. Cultura compartida. Lengua y cultura. Portugués lengua no materna.

#### Introduction

According to several scholars on the subject, laughter is constituted as a physiological reaction triggered by a phenomenon of a cognitive nature – humor. Supporting his definition of the concept of these factors, Martin (2007) divides humor into four essential elements: the social context, the cognitive-perceptive process, the emotional response, and the behavioral, and vocal expression that is laughter. In this context, Pina (2014) considers that there is a correspondence between laughter, and humor, similar to Travaglia (1990), based on the perception of individuals' emotions. Humor, teaching, and emotion are a privileged trilogy for investigations in this area (RÉMON 2013; BELL 2017).

Given the multiplicity of perspectives regarding what is meant by humor, Attardo (1994) considers it impossible to reach a consensus on what humor is. On the other hand, the various definitions presented by Pina (2014) for the concept in question, lead him to consider humor as a form of communication with immense benefits, both in professional, and personal life.

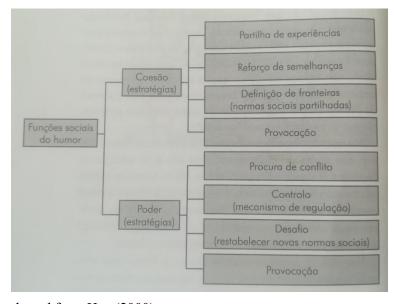
In this sense, we will start by focusing on the main benefits of humor and its strategies, as a framework for the issue of humor in the classroom, particularly in the teaching of foreign languages. Then, we will contextualize humor in the most important references for language teaching in Europe, considering that we will focus on the European standard of Portuguese. Subsequently, we will have a section dedicated to the presentation of activities, using humorous texts, developed with university students with an advanced level of Portuguese as a foreign language, as a way of responding to the comprehension difficulties that arise in contexts with a strong cultural background, characterized by the use of slang, idioms, language games, irony,

and other figures of speech. We conclude with a brief discussion of results, based on students' feedback from the C1 level course of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of Universidade Nova de Lisboa (NOVA FCSH).

## Benefits and strategies of humor

According to scientific evidence, humor has numerous benefits. As a social behavior (Martin 2007), it is through humor that we can reduce the barrier of physical distancing, an aspect that has become especially relevant during the time of the pandemic. In addition to promoting psychological well-being, it contributes to bringing individuals together, helping to alleviate stressful situations that arise in everyday life in a public or private context.

Consequently, Pina (2014) argues that humor is an effective communication strategy, proposing a taxonomy of social functions and strategies associated with humor based on studies by Hay (2000):



**Figure 1** – Functions and strategies of humor

Source: Pina (2014) – adapted from Hay (2000)

The incorporation of humor in classroom activities, which we will discuss later, fits into the cohesion strategies described in Figure 1, considered especially relevant for the social insertion of the non-native speaker, with very positive results in a pandemic context. Due to their characteristics of depreciation or submission of the other, power strategies are not encouraged in class, unless necessary in very particular situations, without the limits of respect for the other and their culture being exceeded.

Rev. EntreLínguas, Araraquara, v.7, n. esp. 6, e021151, Dec. 2021.

# Classroom humor and language teaching

More than a strategy or technique, Abdulmajeed and Hammed (2017) claim that the use of humor in the classroom is a new teaching method. Research shows that the use of humor in a pedagogical context facilitates the understanding of content and increases the attention of learners, enabling the development of creativity, and improving social relationships. In this sense, Pina (2014) supports the benefits of humor in learning in four fundamental pillars: creativity, memorization, motivation, and interpersonal communication.

Despite humor being "an important teaching tool that facilitates student learning" (PINA 2014, p. 9, our translation) by bringing together all those involved in the process, in her study on communication with humor, Pina (2014) concludes that not only is humor rarely used as a communication strategy, but it is rarely present in the educational context, a fact that is especially visible in Portuguese and foreign language school textbooks, both in Portugal and in Brazil (CARMELINO; RAMOS, 2018), when compared with similar publications dedicated to the teaching of the English language. In addition, as Bell (2017) notes, humor has not been a matter of special interest in education research, as teaching, and learning are considered serious subjects. It is in applied linguistics that the author sees a change in this paradigm.

Also, in the context of language teaching, the relevance of using humor as a pedagogical practice is recognized, in terms of language acquisition and transmission of its culture (ASKILDSON, 2005), as well as in the work carried out with grammar (ABDULMAJEED; HAMMED, 2017; SANCHEZ; ALENCAR, 2020).

It is necessary, however, that the teacher is sensitive to the type of humor to be used in the classroom and the activities developed with the students. Therefore, it is pertinent to resort to "appropriate humor" (PINA, 2014; ALI et al., 2015, our translation) or "pedagogical" (BRYANT; ZILLMANN, 1989; ABDULMAJEED; HAMMED, 2017), avoiding embarrassing situations of inappropriate humor, offensive, and derogatory.

On the other hand, the inseparability between lexicon and culture (lexicultural elements) is one of the most problematic aspects in understanding humor in a non-mother tongue, given that "this alliance between language and culture links the teaching and learning of a foreign language to meaningful experiences lived and acquired in everyday life, taking into account the social interactions to which a learner is exposed" (BARBOSA, 2009, p. 40, our translation). This aspect is particularly important for educators whose audience is multicultural, as different cultures have different perceptions of humor, not forgetting that the same language spoken in different countries is subject to this type of constraint.

# Framing of humor in guiding documents for language teaching and learning

Despite its advantages, mastering humor in a foreign language is one of the greatest challenges for learners, especially at beginner levels (A1 – beginner level, A2 – elementary level), an aspect also advocated by Bell (2017). According to my teaching experience, and as would be expected, it is easier to make students laugh in Portuguese at intermediate levels (B1 – threshold level, B2 – advantage level) and advanced (C1 – autonomy level, C2 – mastery level), however, initiation students, as long as they are speakers of Latin languages, also can identify and perceive some spontaneous humorous situations to which they are exposed. The understanding of small jokes that arise during class or the use of humor to express themselves verbally in Portuguese are generally indicators of a good or reasonable command of the language on the part of international students.

Next, we will observe the contexts in which humor and the linguistic expressions that characterize it appear represented in the references for language teaching, to understand the relevance attributed to it in pedagogical terms.

For reasons of space, we will stick to the guiding documents Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – CEFR (COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2001) and its recent complementary guide, the Companion Volume – CV (2020), with new descriptors, from which the references for the teaching, learning, and assessment of foreign languages in Portugal are guided<sup>2</sup> and in the European Union.

The CEFR is responsible for defining the six proficiency levels – A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, which aim to measure students' progress throughout the different stages of learning a language. This guide is reflected in all references for language teaching in Portugal, which follow its guidelines regarding reference levels and respective descriptors. Since the CV (still not translated into Portuguese) is assumed as a complement to the previous reference, the CEFR remains valid.

Let's see, then, the relevance attributed to humor in terms of learning a language-culture in these guiding documents.

In the CEFR, humor appears associated with two major contexts:

i. activities: oral and written interaction (figure 2);

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>For more information on guiding documents for language teaching in the European Union and Portugal, see Duarte Martins (2020). This article also presents a comparative table between the proficiency levels proposed by the CEFR and in force in European Portuguese and the levels frequently present in Portuguese as a foreign language course in Brazil, according to the information that has been possible to observe to date.

ii. competences: general, which includes sociocultural knowledge (figure 3), and communicative, which includes sociolinguistic adequacy (figure 4).

Figure 2 – Representation of humor in oral and written interaction activities<sup>3</sup>

	CONVERSAÇÃO
C2	É capaz de conversar com à-vontade e de forma adequada sem que as limitações lin- guísticas o impeçam de levar uma vida social e pessoal realizada.
C1	É capaz de utilizar a língua em sociedade com flexibilidade e eficácia, incluindo um registo afectivo, subtil e humorístico.

	CORRESPONDÊNCIA
C2	Como B1.
C1	É capaz de se exprimir com clareza e correcção na correspondência pessoal, utilizando a
	língua com flexibilidade e eficácia, incluindo um registo emotivo, subtil e humorístico.

Source: Council of Europe (2001)

In the field of general competences, sociocultural knowledge refers to knowledge of the world, in particular, of the society and culture of the place where a given language is spoken, with the concern that the learner's knowledge is not distorted by stereotypes resulting from previous experience. This competence is divided into seven aspects, namely: (i) everyday life; (ii) living conditions; (iii) interpersonal relationships; (iv) values, beliefs, and attitudes (cf. fig. 3); (v) body language; (vi) social conventions; (vii) ritual behaviors. Humor as sociocultural knowledge is also addressed in studies by Reddington (2015), Bell (2017) and Victoria (2019), among others.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>In the Portuguese version, a mistake was identified, as the descriptor referring to the C2 level of "correspondence" should read "as C1", similarly to what happens in the CEFR versions in other languages.



# Figure 3 – Humor in the context of sociocultural knowledge

- 4. Os valores, as crenças e as atitudes em relação a factores como:
  - · classe social;
  - grupos socioprofissionais (académicos, quadros, funcionários públicos, artesãos, trabalhadores manuais);
  - · riqueza (rendimento e património);
  - · culturas regionais;
  - segurança;
  - · instituições;
  - · tradição e mudança social;
  - · história;
  - · minorias (étnicas ou religiosas);
  - · identidade nacional;
  - países estrangeiros, estados, povos;
  - política;
  - artes (música, artes visuais, literatura, teatro, música e canções populares);
  - religião;
  - humor.

Source: Council of Europe (2001)

On the other hand, communicative language skills integrate sociolinguistic skills, associated with sociocultural skills, focusing on linguistic aspects not previously addressed: (i) linguistic markers of social relations; (ii) rules of courtesy; (iii) expressions of popular wisdom (proverbs, idioms, and the like); (iv) differences in registration (formal, informal, etc.); (v) dialects and accents (cf. fig. 5). It is in this last point that sociolinguistic adequacy arises, referring to the ability to understand markers of social class, origin (regional, national, among others), group (ethnic, professional, etc.), as an example.

Figure 4 – Humor in the context of sociolinguistic skills

	ADEQUAÇÃO SOCIOLINGUÍSTICA
C2	Possui um bom domínio de expressões idiomáticas e de coloquialismos com consciência dos níveis conotativos do significado.  Conhece bem as implicações sociolinguísticas e socioculturais da linguagem utilizada pelos falantes nativos e é capaz de reagir de acordo com esse conhecimento.  É capaz de desempenhar o papel de mediador entre locutores da língua-alvo e da sua comunidade de origem, considerando as diferenças socioculturais e sociolinguísticas.
C1	É capaz de reconhecer um vasto leque de expressões idiomáticas e de coloquialismos, e de perceber mudanças de registo; poderá, todavia, necessitar de confirmar pormenores esporádicos, especialmente se o sotaque não lhe for familiar.  É capaz de seguir filmes nos quais surja uma quantidade considerável de calão e de usos idiomáticos.  É capaz de utilizar a língua flexivelmente e com eficácia para fins sociais, incluindo os usos afectivos, os humorísticos e as subtilezas.

Source: Council of Europe (2001)

From the CEFR's point of view, we can thus verify that humor is understood as a competence that can be mobilized through oral and written interaction activities. The domain of humorous uses of the language integrates the descriptors related to users with higher levels of language proficiency, in particular, the C1 level. And what does the CEFR CV add about humor?

To answer this question, we not only identified the contexts in which humor occurred in the CV, but also located the equivalent information in the CEFR to compare the contents of both frameworks.

First, it was found that humor became part of written production activities as a descriptor of creative writing (figure 5), which was not the case in the CEFR.

Figure 5 – Humor as a descriptor of written production activities

	Creative writing
C2	Can relate clear, smoothly flowing and engaging stories and descriptions of experience in a style appropriate to the genre adopted.  Can exploit idiom and humour appropriately to enhance the impact of the text.
C1	Can produce clear, detailed, well-structured and developed descriptions and imaginative texts in an assured, personal, natural style appropriate to the reader in mind.  Can incorporate idiom and humour, though use of the latter is not always appropriate.  Can give a detailed critical review of cultural events (e.g. plays, films, concerts) or literary works.

Source: Council of Europe (2020)

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Compared to the CEFR, the CV operated at this point a slight reformulation of the first descriptor of levels C1 and C2 (the only one that integrated the CEFR), having enriched the creative writing tasks with new descriptors. Today, learners must also be able to use humor more (C2) or less (C1) appropriately depending on their level of proficiency.

The humor continues to be part of the sociolinguistic adequacy regarding the ability to effectively master "joking usage" of the language in the CV. On the other hand, new descriptors appear at both C levels (cf. Figure 4), and humor now has its descriptor at C1 level, in association with irony, cultural references, and nuances of meaning (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Humor in the context of sociolinguistic skills

	Sociolinguistic appropriateness
C2	Can mediate effectively and naturally between users of the target language and members of their own community, taking account of sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences.  Has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative levels of meaning.  Appreciates virtually all the sociolinguistic and sociocultural implications of language used by proficient users of the target language and can react accordingly.  Can effectively employ, both orally and in writing, a wide variety of sophisticated language to command, argue, persuade, dissuade, negotiate and counsel.
C1	Can recognise a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts; may, however, need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar.  Can understand humour, irony and implicit cultural references and pick up nuances of meaning.  Can follow films employing a considerable degree of slang and idiomatic usage.  Can use language flexibly and effectively for social purposes, including emotional, allusive and joking usage.  Can adjust their level of formality (register and style) to suit the social context: formal, informal or colloquial as appropriate, and maintain a consistent register.  Can frame critical remarks or express strong disagreement diplomatically.

Source: Council of Europe (2020)

Finally, humor also includes a final section of supplementary individual descriptors of the CV, within the scope of mediation, of activities and communicative strategies in language. As a mediating agent, the learner should contribute to the creation of bridges and the construction or transmission of meanings in various contexts (social, pedagogical, cultural, linguistic, or professional). Thus, humor appears as a descriptor of online conversations and discussions at level C2 and, for the first time at level B2, as a promoter of positive atmospheres (figure 7).

Figure 7 – Humor in the context of mediation in supplementary descriptors

Online conversation and discussion	
C2	Can use with precision colloquialisms, humorous language, idiomatic abbreviations and/or specialised register to enhance the impact of comments made in an online discussion.
C1	Can express their ideas and opinions with precision in an online discussion on a complex subject or specialised topic related to their field, presenting and responding to complex lines of argument convincingly.  Can critically evaluate online comments and express negative reactions diplomatically.

Establishing a positive atmosphere	
B2	Can establish a supportive environment for sharing ideas and practice by providing clear explanations and encouraging people to explore and discuss the issue they are encountering, relating it to their experience.
	Can use humour appropriate to the situation (e.g. an anecdote, a joking or light-hearted comment) in order to create a positive atmosphere or to redirect attention.
	Can create a positive atmosphere and encourage participation by giving both practical and emotional support.
B1	Can create a positive atmosphere by the way they greet and welcome people and ask a series of questions that demonstrate interest.

Source: Council of Europe (2020)

We must, however, wait for future developments regarding these independent descriptors, as they are not yet incorporated into the skills and activities included in the CV.

In short, the importance that humor has in the domain of language and its senses by proficient users (C levels) is not properly reflected in its representation in the CEFR, an observation that extends to idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms and slang. Bouguerra (2010, p. 367-368, our translation) warns of this same fact, emphasizing that "the mastery of the language-culture of the other also requires the development of the ethno-socio-cultural, semiotic, aesthetic and pragmatic components of the language, through the mastery of the different characteristic discursive forms of everyday communication" to which the international student should be exposed. With the inclusion of new descriptors associated with humor, the CV reinforced this communication strategy a little more, in which we must continue to invest, investing in the development of independent descriptors and giving greater visibility to humor in the context of written and oral production and interaction activities. Next, we will present some activities that aim to develop the sensitivity of Portuguese foreign language learners to master humorous registers, including the recognition and understanding of slang, idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, and the like.

# Humor as a pedagogical practice in classes of Portuguese as a Foreign Language: activities based on humorous texts

The strategies for incorporating humor into language classes, which we will now discuss, have been tested in the C1 level classes of the Portuguese Language and Culture courses for foreigners at NOVA FCSH, over several years of pedagogical practice. The C1 level classes are made up of students of the most varied nationalities, often under the Erasmus+ program<sup>4</sup>, also including foreign residents in Portugal who want to improve their knowledge of the Portuguese language. The endolingual environment in which they move brings benefits in terms of language proficiency. On the other hand, the multicultural context that characterizes these groups of students encourages intercultural dialogue and respect for differences, as well as opening the mind to new realities and ways of thinking and seeing the world.

The work with humorous activities in the Portuguese as a foreign language class was born from the identification of the difficulty of understanding texts of this nature by proficient learners of the language and the subsequent need to provide these students with self-learning tools conducive to mastering the language-culture. and its idiosyncrasies, with similar purposes to those postulated by Bouguerra (2010, p. 378, our translation): "learning to identify, behind the ludic, the cultural, social or political referent; enrich sociocultural competence (stereotyping, shared knowledge, taboos...); develop pragmatic and discursive competence (satire, irony, criticism, denunciation...)".

In this sense, the students worked on different types of oral texts (radio sections, sketches, and videos) and written texts (chronicles with a humorous and critical nature), with a strong multimodal component, from which they carried out oral comprehension and reading activities. As tools capable of introducing humor into the educational context, according to Pina (2014, p. 195, our translation), "it is a waste not to use these materials [images, videos, music, and sounds]".

The presence of humorous elements that enhance laughter and fun as a "form of communication" was conveyed through the use of irony and sarcasm, wordplay, and puns, exaggerations, among others. The shared cultural load associated with the lexicon, as well as idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, and slang were also decisive for the selection of the type of texts to work in class. The humor associated with the characters and situations also played an important role in the activities developed, and it was necessary to carry out a brief contextualization of the actors and the situation leading to the creation of the sketches and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>It is a European program that supports the exchange of university students between program countries and their partners.

chronicles analyzed. These activities have undergone adjustments since it is essential to know how to identify transversal themes in time and themes that need to be replaced by more current ones, these activities have undergone adjustments since it is essential to know how to identify transversal themes in time and themes that need to be replaced by more current ones, which should meet the needs and interests of learners in their daily lives.

Next, we present a series of activities developed in Portuguese as a foreign language class that aims to awaken proficient users to the humorous and cultural component of the language.

# Preliminary activities with humorous oral texts:

# Phase 1 - problem identification

- i. Watch and/or listen to radio features, sketches and humorous videos (2 times).
- ii. Identify unfamiliar words, phraseologies, idioms, slang, etc. for collective discussion.
- iii. Recount the situation, recognize humorous intentions, criticisms and justified ironies based on observed verbal and non-verbal elements.

This type of activity began to be carried out at the beginning of classes as an icebreaker, has proved to be extremely important to identify the need to work with humorous texts, because, until now, I was convinced that students from levels C1 and C2, due to their proficiency in the Portuguese language, had no difficulties in understanding this type of texts. Students generally perceived everything they heard or read, except for unfamiliar words or expressions, and the challenge resides in understanding connotative meanings, idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, and slang and their contextualization, in addition to ironies, critical intentions and elements. lexicultural due to lack of familiarity with specific cultural references.

Wittgenstein (1921) already stated that "the limits of my language are the limits of my world" and this was precisely my question as a teacher: how to help international students proficient in Portuguese to overcome this type of limitations? In this sense, activities were adapted with progressive degrees of difficulty.

# Phase 2 – an adaptation of activities

- i. Oral comprehension exercises to accompany the radio and video rubrics: students had access to the partial transcript of the contents, and had to complete the missing information by listening/viewing them.
- ii. Listening and reading comprehension exercises to discuss more challenging linguistic elements, contextualization of the communicative situation, critical intention, etc.
- iii. Research, through the joint search of information in digital dictionaries and other online resources.

Despite being time consuming, the introduction of listening comprehension exercises in the initial contacts with humorous oral texts produced very positive effects, helping students to overcome the problems of identifying unknown or unfamiliar linguistic elements. The oral comprehension and reading exercises are also supported by information research, to make students independent users of the language, being able to seek solutions to linguistic problems they face in their daily lives, through strategies of research developed in class together with the teacher. This work is particularly important for mastering the Portuguese language in more challenging contexts, as in the case of humorous, critical, and literary texts, considering also that the course includes students from the areas of literature, linguistics and philology. In addition to its playful component and linguistic challenge, the confrontation with texts of a humorous nature and the like aims, ultimately, leads learners to develop critical thinking.

After explaining the general methodologies applied in the mobilization of activities with humorous texts, we now present specific exercises worked more recently with students in the C1 level classes.

## Specific activities based on humorous texts:

### **Activity 1 – Portuguese comedians**

Students watch four videos by Ricardo Araújo Pereira (RAP) and the humorous group Gato Fedorento to answer questions directed towards the critical intentions or situations that triggered them. Humor results mostly from sexual stereotypes (figure 8, figure 9), social, political, and economic criticism (figure 10, figure 11).

### Video 1

Question: What are the arguments in favor of Benfica's pink kit?

Figure 8 – RAP, "Pink Equipment"



Source: Ricardo Araújo Pereira (2007)

## Video 2

Question: This sketch was created to alert attention to the introduction of a new law. Which one? (The aim is also to establish a link with video 1)



Figure 9 – Gato Fedorento, "Pink Vest"

Source: Gato Fedorento (2006)

Rev. EntreLínguas, Araraquara, v.7, n. esp. 6, e021151, Dec. 2021. DOI: https://doi.org/10.29051/el.v7iesp.6.15452

### Video 3

Question: Who is the target of criticism of this sketch?

Figure 10 – Gato Fedorento, "The man to whom it seems it happened I don't know what"



Source: Gato Fedorento (2006)

# Video 4

Question: What do you think is being criticized in this sketch? (cf. the video is based on a real event: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjRIbU3c8DU)

Figure 11 – RAP, "Hotline (INEM - Mafamude Firefighters)"



Source: RAP, "Hotline (INEM - Mafamude Firefighters)" (2008)

# Activity 2 - Expressions related to the financial situation and linguistic records

#### video 5

1. Watch the first part of the sketch (up to 1:26).

Figure 12 – Gato Fedorento, "Fine"



Source: Gato Fedorento (2006)

- 2. Exercise: complete the transcription of the dialogue, assuming the position of translator and proposing equivalent sentences for the speech used by the policeman that the conductor does not understand (group work).
  - 3. Discussion of results.
  - 4. Watch the full video and compare the results.
- 5. Discussion of slang and other colloquialisms that occur in the translator's speech, especially expressions associated with money.
- 6. Discussion of expressions related to poverty, wealth, money, and debt + fill-in-the-blank exercise on finance text in the context of everyday life.
- 7. Discussion of linguistic registers and language levels + exercise to identify linguistic registers and language levels in selected text excerpts.

# Activity 3 – Cultural elements and linguistic dysphemisms based on chronicles by Miguel Esteves Cardoso (MEC)

- 1. Brief presentation of MEC's biography to contextualize humorous chronicles with a critical intention and a strong cultural background.
- 2. Reading and discussion of selected excerpts from the author's chronicles.
- 3. Chronicle "Palavrões" (about swear words and their use in the language): exercise of oral comprehension based on the text adapted by the author for an erotic literature festival "I like bad words": completion of the transcribed text, while watches a video of a Portuguese actor reading the text at the aforementioned festival: reading comprehension: questions about idioms

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and ironic intention, comment on the sentence: "It is worse to speak bad Portuguese than to speak bad Portuguese!".

### Video 6

Figure 13 – Miguel Guilherme reads MEC's text "I like bad words"



Source: Miguel Guilherme - I like bad words (2010)

This exercise has very positive effects among international students, who are not used to approaching swearing in the classroom as teaching content. On the other hand, if this topic is interesting to work with all age groups, this text is only suitable for adults and young adults given its more explicit content.

4. Chronicle "Names of our land": students do preliminary research on the meaning of idiomatic expressions that occur in the text, so that in the following class they proceed to the reading and collective discussion of selected excerpts from the chronicle.

In this chronicle, humor is based on Portuguese place names that have fun names or sexual connotations, among others, and their use in the language. To finish the activity, we observed images of some of the mentioned locations in class, including others, such as the unexpected village of Covide, in the north of Portugal.

Rev. EntreLínguas, Araraquara, v.7, n. esp. 6, e021151, Dec. 2021.

Notireto Nacional Local Iustiça Mundo Economia Desporto Volta Pessoas Inovação Cultura Opinião Covide, a freguesia que acha graça à semelhança com o nome do coronavírus

Alexandra Lopes 22 Fevereiro 2000 às 13.25

COMENTAR

TOPICOS
COTOLANÁTUS
COVIDE PESSOAS INOVAÇÃO CUITURO OPINIÃO

COVIDE PESSOAS INOVAÇÃO OPINIÃO

COVIDE PESSOA

Figure 14 – Unusual Portuguese toponym image

Source: Lopes (2020)

As a result of the curiosity stimulated by this activity, I had the opportunity to see the photo album of a student who, in times of a pandemic, decided to visit several of these less touristy places in the country mentioned in the MEC chronicle.

### **Activity 4**– Labor Day (May 1)

- 1. Listening to the humorous chronicle "Acquiring Raw Products" from the section Mixórdia de RAP Themes on Rádio Comercial (available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGV6FUx7X8A).
  - 2. Listening comprehension exercise: completion of the chronicle text transcription.
- 3. Reading comprehension exercise: questions about the event that gave rise to the chronicle, idiomatic expressions used, irony, and critical intention, cultural references, and lexicultural elements.
- 4. Research on the repercussions of this event in various media: television (figure 15), advertising (figure 16), Wikipedia (figure 17), radio (figure 18).

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Figure 15 – Consequences of a Portuguese hypermarket campaign on television



Source: Benevides et al. (2012)

Figure 16 – Advertising campaign repercussions



Source: Fugas (2012)

Figure 17 – The Wikipedia Campaign Controversy



Source: Wikipédia (2012)

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Figure 18 – The continuation of the radio controversy a year later



Source: Mixórdia de Temáticas | Adquirir à Bruta II (2013)

Despite the search for information in the media, the biggest challenge raised by this activity was the identification of the meaning of the expression "mother's love". From the moment a Brazilian telenovela appeared with the same title as the expression, the students started to associate the expression present in the chronicle with this telenovela, or not realizing its relationship with the context of the chronicle, in general, they did not try to go further. in addition to trying to discover its relationship with the tattoos of the Portuguese who participated in the colonial war of 1961–1974, given the difficulty of locating this information.

### Activity 5 – (New) Portuguese and Brazilian orthographic agreement and standards

1. Viewing a selected excerpt from a sketch with two lusophone humorists: the Portuguese RAP and the Brazilian Gregório Duvivier as motivation for the debate on the orthographic agreement of the Portuguese language.

Figure 19 – RAP and Gregório Duvivier, "A Portuguese and a Brazilian enter a bar"



Source: Experimenta Portugal 17 - Um Português e um Brasileiro Entram num Bar (2017)

- 2. Listening comprehension exercise: discussion of irony and critical intent, puns, cultural elements, lexical differences between the two varieties of Portuguese, problems with orthographic agreement.
- 3. Discussion of the correction of the exercises and the eventual challenges posed by the presence of two varieties of Portuguese (European and Brazilian). Since this exercise is carried out at the end of the course, only in this third moment is the transcript of the excerpt provided to the students.
- 4. Orthographic agreement: students are asked about some aspects of the agreement as an introduction to the subject, from facts and myths to the changes implemented and their application in practice (or not) in different contexts (university, government, media social, etc.).



**Figure 20** – The orthographic agreement of the Portuguese language

Source: Author's collection

This activity culminates with a debate on the orthographic agreement, which has already been built from the discussion on the subject. Students are divided into two groups: in favor and against the agreement, and they must resort to arguments that support their positions.

# Supplementary activities

## **Activity 1**– Pandemic and confinement

1. Viewing a chronicle of the section Caderneta de Cromos by Nuno Markl on Rádio Comercial on 03/12/2020 (corresponding to the initial phase of confinement in Portugal), identifying unknown words and expressions, idiomatic expressions, and colloquialisms.

Figure 21 – Nuno Markl, "COVID-19 – 10 Years of the Chromium Book"



Source: Rádio Comercial | COVID-19 - 10 Anos da Caderneta de Cromos (2020)

- 2. Retell the situation and contextualize it with the situation you are experiencing.
- 3. Comment on images from the previous day with empty supermarket shelves and crowded beaches for collective reflection of the chronicle's message: "Don't be nerds!" and discussion of the connotative meaning of "chrome".

### Activity 2 - Pandemic, confinement and lexicultural elements

1. Viewing and listening to a humorous music video by Vasco Palmeirim on Rádio Comercial on 04/29/2020, to identify the situation that led to the creation of the song's lyrics: Donald Trump's suggestion to inject disinfectant to treat the coronavirus.

Betadine com Soflan (Vanishixau) by Vasco Palmeirim

VAMOS INJETAR

BETADINE

Figure 22 – Vasco Palmeirim, "Betadine with Soflan"

Source: Rádio Comercial | Betadine com Soflan - Online in The Night (2020)

2. Discussion of explicit and implicit cultural references in the lyrics of the song: detergent brands (see figure 22) and the original song from which the lyrics were adapted (successful female band in the 80s in Portugal).



Figure 23 – Sweet, "Tomorrow Morning"

Source: Doce - Amanhã De Manhã (Ao Vivo / O Tal Canal / 1983) (2021)

These activities arose spontaneously in classes, following the daily vicissitudes that accompanied the evolution of the pandemic in the country and in the world, at a time when, in the middle of confinement, in distance classes there was a need to raise awareness for responsible behavior, externalize feelings and relieve tension concerning the situation we were going through.

In short, activities that combine humor with learning have the potential to liven up foreign language classes, while enabling debate on linguistic issues that this type of authentic audiovisual materials promotes by exposing learners to the real use of the language, as they are "produced for communicative purposes and not for language teaching" (COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2001, p. 204, our translation). Pereira and Ribeiro (2015) also corroborate the importance of humor as a pedagogical resource, "subscribing to it in the light of understandings

of Media Education, and the dimension of knowledge of the world around us" (idem, p. 140, our translation), in particularly through radio and other journalistic formats, for the decisive role they play in terms of information and current affairs.

#### **Discussion of results**

The enthusiasm shown by students towards activities based on humorous texts has been positively reflected in their quantitative assessments concerning the work carried out during the C1 level course.

Among some of the comments shared by students about their experience at the end and after the course, the following stand out:

- 1. Synchronous classes in confinement motivated by the pandemic:
- a) Student 1: Portuguese descent from Switzerland "I'm really enjoying learning Portuguese, even though I know it's still a long way to go. The fact that the classes are always a lot of fun helps it not seem like a big effort";
- b) Student 2: from Italy, one year after the course —"I always remember with great affection our Portuguese language classes and the fun moments that characterized them with great spontaneity and participation on the part of everyone, even when we knew it would have been difficult (and in the end it was not possible) to have face-to-face classes again. ";
- c) Student 3: Portuguese descent from Belgium, second phase of confinement "I would also like to thank you for the course, which helped me a lot, and for your patience and attention. I think my level of Portuguese and my knowledge of Portuguese (and Lusophone) culture have improved a lot".
- 2. Synchronous classes recorded due to the impossibility of being present during class hours:
- a) Student 4: from Italy –"I wanted to thank you, because the classes are always useful and captivating, and in addition, especially in the last class, I answered questions that I have had for a long time and it was very interesting. (...) Thank you for your availability and because even with the heavy [sic] that is staying at home for a long time, during your classes time passes faster and we will always learn and have fun at the same time".

These testimonies prove that working with humor in Portuguese as a foreign language class with advanced learners has positive effects in terms of language learning, while contributing to a greater understanding of the culture and its lexicultural elements. The

emotional component is another aspect that stands out from the students' words, confirming the association between mood, emotions and learning established by several scholars. Given that students say that these exercises helped them to face the confinement phase more optimistically way, we can still conclude that these activities had a significant impact on their academic and personal lives during the period of the pandemic.

#### **Final considerations**

Numerous studies prove the benefits of humor in communication in the most varied areas (business, health, education), constituting itself as a strategy to capture the public's attention, allowing to create empathy or resolve conflict situations. To take full advantage of the social function of humor cohesion (cf. Figure 1: sharing of experiences, reinforcement of similarities, shared norms, provocation), we must be aware of the potential and limitations of humorous processes, considering our audience target and their age group, as not all individuals laugh at the same according to their age, the group to which they belong or the circumstances in which they find themselves.

In the educational context, the teacher does not need to be fun or can make whole classes laugh to incorporate humor in the classroom, it is enough that he has a reasonable mastery of appropriate humor techniques. On the other hand, liking humor and laughing allows the teacher to be alert to all potential situations of humor around him that can be transformed into pedagogical activities and transferred to his classroom. In this sense, one must keep in mind the need to adapt humorous activities according to our objectives and the context of the event, recycling them whenever they prove to be obsolete, irrelevant or fail to fulfill the purposes for which they were created.

In the case of teaching a language-culture, the selection of humorous texts should also be adjusted to the level of linguistic proficiency of the groups, also constituting the culture of the participants as a factor to consider, especially in a multicultural context. Given the strong cultural component that humor contains, generally this type of activities allows promoting platforms for intercultural debate in the classroom with very positive effects, and the teacher (as a mediator) must know how to manage any type of conflict of ideas that may arise.

The humorous activities incorporated in the advanced level Portuguese foreign language class allowed international students to access elements of shared culture, specifically Portuguese and Lusophone cultures, as well as contact with different registers and linguistic varieties of Portuguese, while developing their socio-cultural skills and comprehension and

interaction of oral and written language in the communicative approach to language. The exercises promoted work with more challenging linguistic elements, such as slang, colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions, encouraging the analysis of pragmatic, social and lexicultural elements in interaction in oral and written texts. Finally, this work promoted the development of critical awareness about current situations that were the target of criticism and motivated humor and laughter, as recommended by the descriptors of the CEFR (2001).

In terms of language teaching, as stated by Bouguerra (2007, p. 380) "a didacticization of the aesthetic-playful-referential function represents more of a priority than an excess of luxury", humor not being mere entertainment. For this reason, it is considered that the guiding documents for the teaching, learning, and assessment of languages should reinforce the weight of humor as a strategy in the classroom.

As Rémon (2013) argues, humor as a pedagogical tool is a linguistic risk that has undoubtedly been worth taking over several years of experience in teaching Portuguese as a foreign language.

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### How to reference this article

MARTINS, S. M. D. Humor and teaching of Portuguese as a Foreign Language in a multicultural environment. **Rev. EntreLínguas**, Araraquara, v. 7, n. esp. 6, e021151, Dec. 2021. e-ISSN: 2447-3529. DOI: https://doi.org/10.29051/el.v7iesp.6.15452

**Submitted:** 27/08/2021 **Approved:** 27/11/2021 **Published:** 28/12/2021

