

THE CONTRIBUTION OF NARRATIVE GENRES IN ORDER TO LEARN OR  
TEACH THE PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE

*A CONTRIBUIÇÃO DOS GÊNEROS NARRATIVOS PARA SE ESTUDAR/ENSINAR A  
LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA*

*LA CONTRIBUCIÓN DE LOS GÉNEROS NARRATIVOS AL ESTUDIO/ENSEÑANZA  
DE LA LENGUA PORTUGUESA*



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**ABSTRACT:** The Portuguese language is part of the daily lives of millions of people all over the world who appropriate this language to serve different purposes. This reality leads us to consider the constitutive similarities and differences in the way in which the Portuguese language is conceived, that is, whether as a mother tongue or as a foreign language, for example, given the fact that it is this very conception that will make terms such as the study or teaching of that language may be adopted. Taking this need into consideration, as well as the existence of aspects that bring together the different contexts in which the Portuguese language is worked or taught in the classroom, this text aims to verify the contribution of predominantly narrative genres in the teaching-learning process of Portuguese both as a language mother tongue and as a foreign language. For this, we have the theoretical support of Bakhtin (1997), among other authors who deal with themes relevant to the proposed discussion.

**KEYWORDS:** Teaching. Portuguese language. Narrative genres. Literary sphere.

**RESUMO:** *A língua portuguesa desempenha um papel significativo no cotidiano de milhões de indivíduos, distribuídos globalmente, que a utilizam para diversos propósitos. Esta realidade suscita a reflexão sobre as semelhanças e diferenças fundamentais na concepção da língua portuguesa, seja como língua materna ou estrangeira. Essa perspectiva influencia a adoção de termos como estudo ou ensino desta língua. Conscientes da necessidade decorrente dessa distinção e da presença de elementos comuns nos variados contextos em que a língua portuguesa é trabalhada ou ensinada em ambientes educacionais, o objetivo deste texto é analisar a contribuição dos gêneros predominantemente narrativos no processo de ensino-aprendizagem do Português, tanto como língua materna quanto como língua estrangeira. Para tal análise, fundamentamo-nos nas teorias de Bakhtin (1997) e em outros autores que abordam temas pertinentes à discussão proposta.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Ensino. Língua portuguesa. Gêneros narrativos. Esfera literária.*

**RESUMEN:** *La lengua portuguesa forma parte de la vida cotidiana de millones de personas, quienes, repartidas por los cuatro rincones del mundo, se apropian de esta lengua para servir a diferentes propósitos. Esta realidad nos lleva a considerar las similitudes y diferencias constitutivas en la forma en que se concibe la lengua portuguesa, es decir, como lengua materna o como lengua extranjera, por ejemplo, ya que es esta concepción la que hará que términos como se puede adoptar el estudio o la enseñanza de esa lengua. Conscientes de esta necesidad y de la existencia de aspectos que aglutinan los diferentes contextos en los que se trabaja o enseña la lengua portuguesa en el aula, pretendemos, en este texto, verificar la contribución de los géneros predominantemente narrativos en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del portugués como lengua materna y como lengua extranjera. Para ello contamos con el apoyo teórico de Bakhtin (1997), entre otros autores que abordan temas relevantes para la discusión propuesta.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Enseñanza. Lengua portuguesa. Géneros narrativos. Ámbito literario.*

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## Introduction

Acquiring or learning a language involves facing different challenges, many of which are presented in a didactic-pedagogical context since acquiring and learning are terms that can be related to formal teaching situations. The perception that the countless issues related to these two domains are distinct leads us to understand the need to establish specific terminologies for each of them. This understanding implies that, when it comes to the mother tongue, the teaching of the Portuguese language in schools does not actually occur but rather a study aimed at enabling the student to master it in all its complexity.

When entering school, the individual, as a holder of their language, already has considerable linguistic, grammatical, and discursive knowledge, especially in the spoken form. Therefore, he can produce and understand various texts expressed in different primary discursive genres (BAKHTIN, 1997), especially during this phase of his life. It is up to the school, then, to develop skills and competencies linked to the different practices of reading, writing, speaking, and linguistic-grammatical analysis, as determined by official documents (BRASIL, 1997; 2018), work that begins in the first years of schooling of the subject and accompanies him throughout his entire trajectory in basic education, mainly.

In order to achieve this purpose, both materials and didactic-pedagogical procedures, as well as teacher training, are carefully planned to help the student overcome any difficulties related to the use of the language in different situations presented to them. In this context, we understand that, in Portuguese language classes for native speakers, a process of study takes place instead of teaching the language. In contrast, when the Portuguese language is approached as a foreign language (FL) or second language (L2), there is effectively a teaching-learning dynamic in which the subject, in most cases, is unaware of the language in its spoken and written modalities, seeking to learn it through a formal teaching-learning process.

The debate on teaching the Portuguese language, both for native and foreign speakers, presents different perspectives on the difficulties, challenges, and nuances of this complex universe. This reality, naturally instigating, encourages us to participate in this dialogue; at the same time, it causes us some fear, given the great responsibility of addressing such relevant topics of interest to all individuals who make up society.

Aware of the challenge to be faced and the different possible approaches to enter into this discussion, we raise the following initial questions: teaching based on speech genres has contributed significantly to the improvement of Portuguese language classes, both as a mother

tongue and as a foreign language? Within the multiplicity of speech genres present in society, do the predominantly narrative ones play a different role in the study/teaching of the Portuguese language in these two contexts, respectively?

The first question, at first glance simple, could lead to an equally simple and direct answer. However, so that relevant aspects of this teaching can be properly considered, it is necessary to make an incursion, albeit brief, into the history of teaching Portuguese as a Mother Tongue (PLM) in Brazil. After all, any formal teaching-learning process occurs within the context of societies, made up of different groups of individuals who, by thinking and acting in other ways, cause transformations and even revolutions in the world.

Therefore, changes are inherent to human reality, and the teaching of the Portuguese language, without a doubt, is not exempt from them, even if voices are still heard that try to persuade that education remains unchanged. In other words, the belief that everything in the world evolves contrasts with the mistaken idea that teaching remains stagnant in time, using obsolete methods and facing the same difficulties.

Contrary, then, to those who defend the idea that the Brazilian educational reality is immutable, the teaching of the Portuguese language, specifically, has presented many significant changes over time. So much so that today, the theoretical-methodological apparatus and, consequently, the teaching materials and classes taught to Basic Education students, for example, bear little resemblance to the reality of previous centuries and/or decades.

Soares (2002), with singular precision, presents us with the trajectory of the discipline “Portuguese Language” as a mother tongue in Brazil from the colonial period to the introduction and, consequently, the incorporation of Linguistics and its various aspects into teacher training courses. With a closer look at the reality of the classroom, Bunzen (2011) also deals with the trajectory of the Portuguese language discipline in Brazil. In this task, both authors highlight facts that, at different times in our history, contributed to the Portuguese language gradually and mercilessly becoming the dominant language not only in classrooms, but also throughout a vast territory characterized by heterogeneity.

Among the various changes that have occurred, each with recognized relevance, we highlight the context after the 1990s, when important official documents were published, the National Curricular Parameters (PCN) (BRASIL, 1997) and the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) (BRASIL, 2018).

The publication and then distribution of these documents throughout the national territory, despite flaws pointed out by Meira and Bonamino (2021), among several other

authors, contributed to the work developed both by researchers in the area and by professors who, in fact, they know the complexity of the country's classrooms, causing one of the most significant transformations in the history of Brazilian education. Although we are aware that this transformation is not limited to one aspect or another of the broad scope of teaching the Portuguese language, in this case, we understand that the entire process of change took place thanks to the adoption of a new and significant conception of language from which the text, in all its complexity, becomes the object of language teaching. This means that, according to Geraldi (1997; 2011), the language teaching-learning process must begin and end with the text in the classroom.

This “movement”, strongly defended from the 1980s onwards, mainly contributed to the teaching of the Portuguese language becoming based on speech genres, which, without a doubt, has favored the presence and maintenance of discursive multiplicity not only in the classroom but also throughout the didactic-pedagogical universe. Studying the different genres that circulate in various spheres of society contributes, therefore, to the student learning the language and not just part of it, as happened in other periods of our history, when the teaching of grammar was confused with language teaching.

The discussion about teaching Portuguese as a foreign language (PLE) also involves various aspects, many of which distance themselves from the reality of teaching Portuguese as a Mother Tongue (PLM), after all, it is necessary to consider the specificities of this universe, in which the subject is led to learn the Portuguese language for different reasons, among which professional interest often stands out. Bronckart (1999, p. 30) states that if human actions and language actions take place in a socio-historical contextuality or, in other words, if we act in and through language, any linguistic approach must necessarily be of interactionist character.

Along the same line of reasoning, Almeida Filho (2004) understands that learning a foreign language requires the subject to consider the cultural reality of the language learned since the effective teaching-learning process depends on knowledge of a wide range of factors beyond the linguistic-grammatical level. It is because we believe in proposals that advocate more culturally sensitive language teaching that we understand that the presence of speech genres in PLE classes can significantly contribute to students having a more excellent command of the language, just as happens in PLM classes.

Thus, the second question directs our gaze to a specific group of speech genres, predominantly narrative ones, which, from our point of view, play a crucial role in teaching the Portuguese language. In an attempt to prove this statement, we present and discuss a real PLE

teaching-learning situation in which the potential of these genres is used to develop the discursive competence of undergraduates at the University of Georgia (UGA).

### **The protagonism of predominantly narrative genres in PLM classes**

For many scholars, such as Barthes *et al.* (2011) and Reuter (2002), for example, narrating is such a natural action that it is present in the lives of human beings from a very early age. The desire to share true or fictional events with others seems to be part of human nature. It is no coincidence, therefore, that narrative typology is the first to be learned by children. According to Fivush and Haden (1997), cited by Macedo and Sperb (2007), it is through narrative forms that children, still very young, begin to understand themselves as part of the real world. By narrating, she creates and gives meaning to her own life.

This “vocation” for narration leads us to believe that all individuals living in society do not have any difficulty understanding or producing predominantly narrative genres. However, this inference is not entirely true, since the understanding and production of any speech genre, whether narrative or not, involves the mastery of different skills and abilities linked both to the genre itself and to the use of orality and/or writing that manifest themselves in the multiple real situations of language use. Along this line of reasoning, we argue that work with narrative genres should be encouraged in Portuguese language classes. We understand that there are significant reasons why this work can be successful, among which we mention the determination of the National Common Curricular Base-BNCC (BRASIL, 2018), according to which

skills, with regard to literary training, involve knowledge of narrative and poetic genres (...) and which concern, in the case of literary narrative, its elements (space, time, characters); to the choices that constitute the style in the texts, in the configuration of time and space and in the construction of the characters; the different ways of telling a story (in first or third person, through a character narrator, with full or partial control of the events); to the polyphony typical of the narratives, which offer levels of complexity to be explored in each year of schooling through the breath of the texts (BRASIL, 2018, p. 138, our translation).

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the critical space that genres from the literary sphere would occupy in Portuguese language classes, given that the vast majority of predominantly narrative genres fall within this sphere, as shown by the grouping of genres proposed by Schneuwly and Dolz (2004).

**Table 1** – List of genres belonging to the order of narration

Fictional literary culture	Examples of oral and written genres
Narrate  Action mimesis through the creation of intrigue in the realm of the believable	Wonderful tale; Fairy tale; Fable; Legend; Adventure narrative; Science fiction narrative; Riddle narrative; Mythical narrative; Sketch or funny story; Novelized biography; Romance; Historical novel; Fantastic novel; Tale; Literary chronicle; He guesses; Joke.

Source: Adapted from Schneuwly and Dolz (2004).

Highlighting the participation of genres from the literary sphere in Portuguese language classes means turning our eyes to the old debate about the value and space of literature in PLM and PLE classes. There are many authors who, throughout our history, have drawn attention to the neglect of literature in classrooms. Still in the 1970s, Antônio Cândido (1972, p. 806), highlighted that one of the main functions of literature is to contribute to the formation of the individual's personality in order to make him know himself and the world around him. which it belongs, already signaled the urgent need to make this area gain significant space in the classroom.

We can say, however, that since then, there have been no major advances, so literature still struggles to gain more space in Portuguese language classes, especially. According to Cosson (2018), nowadays, the school, in its eagerness to work on different genres, ends up leaving aside literary work, which contributes to the subject in the training process not having due contact with literary reading.

Considering the different aspects of genres in the literary sphere that can captivate primary and secondary school students and having as a premise the hypothesis that teachers are aware of students' preferences and explore the potential of these genres in teaching the Portuguese language in the classroom class, we carried out a search in the *Mestrado Profissional em Letras (Profletras)*<sup>2</sup> database. The objective was to verify the representation of predominantly narrative genres, especially those from the literary sphere, in the work developed by master's students working in public primary education in Brazil. This search revealed that, since the creation of the Program in 2013, until now, 357 dissertations have addressed some discourse or textual genre.

<sup>2</sup> Professional Master's in Literature (Profletras).

As expected, many and varied genres are chosen for the work, some of which can be classified as favorites of master's students, given their recurrence in the database in question. The following table presents the genres worked on and their representation in the selected context.

**Table 2** – Genres studied, from 2013 to the present, by *Profletras* master's students

Gender	Number of occurrence	Percentage of occurrence
1. Advertisement	19	5,32%
2. Opinion article	32	8,96
3. Autobiography/biography	10	2,80%
4. Literary blog/vlog	02	0,56%
5. Newsletter	01	0,28%
6. Journal cover	02	0,56%
7. Open letter	01	0,28%
8. Argumentative letter	03	0,84%
9. Reader letter	03	0,84%
10. Letter from the reader	04	1,12%
11. Complaint letter	01	0,28%
12. Request letter	02	0,56%
13. Personal letter	01	0,28%
14. Protest poster	01	0,28%
15. Khartoum	01	0,28%
16. Cause	04	1,12%
17. Charge	09	2,52%
18. Critical comment	03	0,84%
19. Short story	32	8,96%
20. Cordel	08	2,25%
21. Chronicle	22	6,16%
22. Short film	01	0,28%
23. Debate	07	1,96%
24. Dialogue	02	0,56%
25. Diary	02	0,56%
26. Documentary	01	0,28%



<b>27. Email</b>	02	0,56%
<b>28. Question statement</b>	01	0,28%
<b>29. Interview</b>	13	3,64%
<b>30. Fable</b>	11	3,08%
<b>31. Fanfic/fanfiction</b>	04	1,12%
<b>32. Fanzine</b>	01	0,28%
<b>33. Folder</b>	01	0,28%
<b>34. Graphic novel</b>	09	2,52%
<b>35. Infographic</b>	01	0,28%
<b>36. Mock Jury</b>	01	0,28%
<b>37. Legend</b>	02	0,56%
<b>38. Manga</b>	01	0,28%
<b>39. Literary manifesto</b>	01	0,28%
<b>40. Meme</b>	13	3,64%
<b>41. Memories</b>	07	1,96%
<b>42. Mini story</b>	02	0,56%
<b>43. Music/song</b>	06	1,68%
<b>44. Narratives</b>	04	1,12%
<b>45. News</b>	14	3,92%
<b>46. Parody</b>	04	1,12%
<b>47. Theatrical play</b>	04	1,12%
<b>48. Joke</b>	01	0,28%
<b>49. Poem</b>	08	2,25%
<b>50. Poster</b>	01	0,28%
<b>51. Advertising</b>	08	2,25%
<b>52. Fourth cover</b>	01	0,28%
<b>53. Cooking recipe</b>	02	0,56%
<b>54. Essay</b>	01	0,28%
<b>55. Game Rules</b>	01	0,28%
<b>56. Report</b>	05	1,40%
<b>57. News Report</b>	07	1,96%
<b>58. Requirement</b>	01	0,28%
<b>59. Review</b>	06	1,68%

<b>60. Argumentative response</b>	01	0,28%
<b>61. Summary</b>	08	2,25%
<b>62. Romance</b>	05	1,40%
<b>63. Seminar</b>	05	1,40%
<b>64. Soap opera</b>	02	0,56%
<b>65. Comic strips</b>	18	5,04%
<b>Total</b>	357	100%

Source: Prepared by the author.

From our point of view, some aspects of this situation deserve to be commented on. Firstly, the diversity of genres studied. There are 65 different genres representing different socio-discursive spheres. Secondly, there is a large representation of predominantly narrative genres and/or the literary sphere, which, together, total 177 genres, representing 49.58% of the total analyzed. The short story (32 - 8.96%), together with the opinion article, is the most studied genre within *Profletras*, followed by the chronicle (22 - 6.16%). It is also necessary to value the level occupied by several other predominantly narrative genres, such as the fable (11 - 3.08%), the cordel (08 - 2.25%), the poem (08 - 2.25%), and the romance (05 - 1.40%), for example, which also present a significant percentage when compared to other genres included in the scenario considered.

In addition to these results, the research carried out in the *Profletras* database revealed that 71 dissertations were dedicated to the treatment of text/speech genres in a broader way, without addressing one or more specific genres, as we see in Table 02. In this universe, different themes appear, such as: “Cultural diversity and ethnic-racial relations: discursive genres and affirmative actions at school”; “The practice of reading from the perspective of textual/discursive genres”; “(Re)construction of teaching literacy practices and implications for teaching discursive genres”; “Impacts of multimodal resources on the understanding of textual genres”.

The results obtained corroborate the hypothesis that teachers who work in primary education are aware of their students’ preferences regarding certain genres. Thus, they choose to approach their preferred genres, seeking to develop more effective work in the classroom.

## The protagonism of predominantly narrative genres in PLE classes: an experience report

Considering the different contexts in which subjects come into contact with the Portuguese language and our extensive experience as a mother tongue teacher, both in basic education and higher education in Brazil, we present and discuss, in this section of the text, an experience lived as a visiting teacher at the University of Georgia (UGA), more specifically in the *Romance Language's Portuguese Program*, during the period from February 2023 to January 2024. From February to May 2023, we followed classes taught by Professor Cecília Rodrigues to students who, for the most part, have English as their mother tongue and seek, for various reasons, to learn the Portuguese language.

In accordance with the course syllabus, according to which

*Emphasis is placed on literary and cultural skills to promote students' ability to appreciate, read and analyze literary texts, while concentrating on expressing themselves accurately in both oral and written Portuguese. Students will be introduced to key concepts pertaining to Brazilian culture through the study of literary texts. The course will be developed using a chronological framework of cultural movements and literary genres from colonial times to contemporaneity.*

In line with her academic-professional training, the teacher prepared most classes with predominantly narrative genres from the literary sphere as central elements. Through observation of classes, the constant and dominant presence of short stories, short stories, novels, documentaries, and films was verified, from which the teacher not only had the opportunity to instruct on different linguistic-discursive aspects of the language (such as pronunciation, sentence structure, and vocabulary) as well as presenting and discussing varied and relevant themes raised by the material worked on.

The table below, which presents some of the activities developed throughout the course, confirms the relevant role played by predominantly narrative genres in the Portuguese language classes offered to students.

**Table 3** – Display of genres worked on in the subject “Introduction to Language, Literature and Culture of the Portuguese-Speaking World”

Date	Topic	Activities
02/02/2023	History of Brazil	Discussion and individual oral presentation of the “ <i>Carta de Achamento do Brasil</i> ” by Pero Vaz de Caminha.
02/09/2023	Colonization and Indigenous Peoples	Discussion about the work “ <i>Coração na aldeia, pés no mundo</i> ” by Auritha Tabajara, followed by an interview with the author (virtual mode).
02/28/2023	Brazilian way of life	Discussion about the PBS documentary “Black in Brazil,” followed by a debate.
03/21/2023	Geographical realities of Brazil	Discussion about the short story “ <i>Menino Chorão</i> ”, by Cristiane Lira, followed by an interview with the author (in person).
04/06/2023	Brazilian women: femicide	Conversation round about the short story “ <i>Venha ver o pôr-do-sol</i> ”, by Lygia Fagundes Telles.

Source: Prepared by the author.

The way in which the course was conducted highlighted the teacher's concern in avoiding the reductionist treatment of the literary text, which is often taken to the classroom with the sole objective of providing leisure moments for students as if the work literature served only as entertainment (LAJOLO, 1993; COSSON, 2020).

Contrary to this, what we saw were classes where textual exploration strategies, as well as daily dialogue about the works, worked on, led the student to conclude that the literary text could be the path to real language learning. Proposals for reading poems, stories, or documentaries, for example, resulted in activities through which important Brazilian cultural aspects were discussed and/or analyzed. At the end of the work that began with reading and discussing a specific literary genre, we realized the possibilities for students to become more critical and active politically and socially.

Students showed interest in the topics discussed and actively participated in classes. Our attention is drawn to the way in which the teacher distributed class time to take advantage of the favorable points of different oral and written genres, coming from different spheres, highlighting the debates planned by the teacher. Although the effectiveness of this oral genre is widely recognized by scholars (GOMES-SANTOS, 2009; BUNZEN; MÁXIMO, 2013;

SILVA; SARTORI, 2016), our role as observers in the PLE teaching-learning process, a less familiar context for us, allowed us to verify how the entire constitutive dynamics of the debate effectively favors the development of speaking skills, among several other skills, which, in this specific context, is especially valuable. Through debate, as widely recognized, students have the opportunity to investigate a particular topic and present and support their points of view while at the same time listening to and contemplating divergent perspectives from other people.

In the reality observed, verifying that the students prepared themselves to carry out the activity was possible. We clearly observed that they researched the topic at hand, “the Brazilian way”, carefully selected arguments both for and against the points of view presented, and considered the need to be respectful towards each other. After all, as Abreu (2010, p. 06, our translation), argues, arguing is, first of all, being able to understand the other(s); it is being able to obtain what we want in a peaceful and cooperative way; is “translating our truth into the truth of the other”. Observation of this activity confirms that debate is an excellent didactic-pedagogical resource to be used in various classes, not only in Portuguese, but in all other subjects that make up the students’ curriculum.

We believe that the student’s interest in both the bibliography and the activities selected by the teacher, and consequently, their engagement in the course, arise, at least in part, from the fact that all the work is based on predominantly narrative genres, which, in a way or another, they awaken the desire or natural desire of human beings to report something, to tell real or fictitious events from their lives, or others. This reasoning makes sense, especially if we consider that brief personal reports were frequent in both the teachers’ and the students’ speeches.

### Final considerations

In this text, we seek to address the predominance of narrative genres in two different situations in which the Portuguese language is studied/taught as a mother tongue and as a foreign language, respectively. In both of these formal teaching contexts, although we adopted different forms of analysis, we found that genres from the literary sphere, preferably the short story, are preferred by teachers.

When it comes to working with the language aimed at native speakers, that is, the first context observed, we found that the majority of Brazilian public primary education teachers who completed their master's degree through *Profletras*, from 2013 to the present, have focused

on a predominantly narrative genre, more specifically the short story or chronicle. When observing Portuguese language classes taught to subjects who view this language as a foreign language, according to the context of analysis, we also observed the predominance of narrative genres to teach the various formal and discursive aspects of the language.

The results achieved reaffirm the idea that narration or predominantly narrative genres are highly appreciated by Portuguese speakers, which helps them to be well accepted in formal teaching situations. Learning or studying a language, considering all its complexity, therefore, seems to be more effective and pleasurable when this happens through texts that narrate real or fictional events, current or old, long or short. In this reality, literature plays an essential social role because appropriating the word as the basic unit of language intended for verbal interaction contributes to making people and their culture better known and more valued.

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