

## Portuguese as a foreign language textbooks: Framing the discourses on the teaching and learning of writing

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### Abstract

Textbooks are a resource that is widely used in language classes. For this reason, they are also one of the principal topics in research on the field of didactics. Several studies were conducted about Portuguese as mother tongue textbooks, but there is a lack of researches and information concerning the textbooks of Portuguese as a foreign language. In this study, the researcher analyses the discourse of the authors/editors in the 'opening texts' of textbooks for (European) Portuguese as a foreign language, for levels A1 and A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference. The study shows that writing competence is relatively neglected by the authors, and infers that might reflect the way that teaching and learning activities for writing are put into practice. Further research will allow to verify if there are indeed activities for learning to write and how they were thought out and organised.

**Keywords:** Language teaching, writing competencies, Portuguese, foreign language, textbooks, writing competencies.

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## 1. Introduction

Textbooks are widely used in the classroom to teach languages and other subjects. For this reason, they are one of the principal research topics in the field of didactics (language, mathematics, geography, etc.). To date, the research has revealed conflicting thoughts regarding methodologies and content choices, and their suitability for government curricula, etc.

Such attitudes are often encountered among teachers because, voluntarily or not, they are part of the debate regarding the quality of textbooks and their usage in the classroom. Some researchers (Castro, 2011; Priolet & Mounier, 2018) have concluded that the teachers' attitudes towards textbooks are ambiguous: Some consider textbooks indispensable, while others deem them superfluous. Many teachers would prefer to banish textbooks for good, and the rest are indifferent. Most use them with caution, taking into account the pedagogical needs of their school and their students.

The majority of studies have been conducted in school contexts (elementary, middle, or secondary level) and not in universities (e.g., Cigales & Oliveira, 2020). This can be explained by the fact that the use of a textbook is not part of the university tradition and most Portuguese editions are geared more towards a younger audience. However, publishers of foreign language textbooks have been producing materials for young adults for decades. In Portugal, for example, the increasing influx of Erasmus + students, along with the high number of emigrants wishing to increase their knowledge of the Portuguese language and culture, has led to an expansion of Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) courses. This reality has brought the use of textbooks into the field of university PFL courses. They are regularly used in Portuguese departments in foreign universities or language centres across the world, though there are few studies about textbooks for PFL in this context.

Research in this field usually concerns other educational levels and settings (e.g., Anca, 2014; Teixeira, 2012). The entrance of many students, the children of emigrants, in the Portuguese school system resulted in the 2007 creation of syllabi and official instructions by the Portuguese Ministry of Education for Portuguese as a second language (Leiria, 2008). Furthermore, in the Portuguese context, the guidelines for the teaching of Portuguese as a foreign language were only published in 2017, by Camoes Instituto de Cooperacao e da Lingua (Direcao de Servicos de Lingua e Cultura, 2017), an institution belonging to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the last decades, the Camoes Institute has created Portuguese departments or chairs in universities on all continents, where people can learn Portuguese language and culture individually or integrated into language degrees. The textbooks used are generally those published in Portugal. All Portuguese universities have PFL courses dedicated to both the foreigners who live in our country and the mobility students (Erasmus + or other international programs).

Determining the characteristics of the written communication process that foreign language learner-writers perform or could potentially perform involves, in part, reconstructing the experience of becoming a writer. This experience is undoubtedly carried out in the classroom. Textbooks are the most common medium for developing communicative competence in the classroom. For this reason, the decision was made to begin the research with the reading and analysis of the textbooks prepared for PFL students. As Okeeffe (2013) points out concerning the teaching of mathematics and science, there have been changes in the way we view the practice of teaching and learning a language (whether the mother tongue or a foreign language) that one would expect to see reflected in textbooks as well.

This study aims to discover how the textbooks published in Portugal for young adults of PFL promote the teaching and learning of writing. Preliminary and exploratory results have already been published (Guerra, 2020a, 2020b). The research starts with the identification of some of the difficulties faced by PFL teachers in Portugal (Guerra, 2020a). Next, the study continues with the analysis of the textbook currently adopted by the Directorate of the PFL course in the University of Algarve (Guerra, 2020b). The investigation has since been extended to other textbooks used in a university context.

This paper focuses on the discourse of the authors and/or editors about the teaching and learning of writing in the so-called ‘opening texts’ (Dionisio, 2000). That is the introductory text, the preface, and/or the letter to the reader/user (teacher or student), usually found at the front of the textbook. Our purpose is (i) to configure the writing practices present in the textbooks, through the discourse of the author or co-ordinator of the textbook(s), contained in these introductory texts; (ii) to try to identify the structuring principles of the selection of writing activities contained in the textbook(s), also referred to in the ‘opening texts’.

## 2. The role of textbooks

Textbooks ‘help define school subjects as students experience them’ (Valverde, Bianchi, Wolfe, Schmidt & Houang, 2002, p. 1). They are pedagogical materials used to transmit knowledge, develop competence, provide exercises to reinforce the acquisition of knowledge and competencies, and assess learning outcomes. They are also a source of social and cultural information and reference for the students. In the case of a foreign language, the textbook may become the only available socio-cultural and communicative reference of the target language, from which the student progressively develops his oral and written competence. As Santos (2017, pp. 153–154) refers,

Teachers commonly use printed textbooks in their classrooms. Without a textbook, teachers and students, may be unable to focus on acquiring knowledge and achieving targets for certain ages or learning levels. Textbooks effectively guide teachers and students toward the appropriate process of gaining knowledge.

The same suggestions can be found in other educational contexts and countries. The relevance of the textbook for the planning and guidance of the teaching and learning process is also suggested by Rachmijati and Cahyati (2020) and by Ramadhana, Indah and Suharti (2019) in Indonesia, for instance, but it is the same in most other countries. In Portugal, textbooks still play a major role in school activities. However, in 2006, when a law for the evaluation, certification and adoption of textbooks by the Government brought about a certain homogenization of them, research into this field almost disappeared.

Textbooks are now lent to students throughout compulsory schooling (i.e., until entry into higher education). There is no control in universities, so teachers are free to use any manual, even if it has not been evaluated before or if it is out of print. In addition, the textbooks for PFL are not part of the list of subjects required by law.

For the teacher, the textbook is the mediator between the curriculum and the planning of content and activities throughout the school year. To some extent, it represents certain forms of curriculum supply that give confidence and security to the teacher (*cf.* also Azevedo & Piris, 2018; Dionisio, 2000; Rachmijati & Cahyati, 2020; Ramadhana et al., 2019; Teixeira, 2012). Zabalza (1992) argued that when teachers plan, they do not commonly work directly with governmental syllabi, but with textbooks that act as guides to structure their classes, due to the textbook's organisation. Apple (2002) was referring to the same argument when he stated that in most American schools the curriculum of school subjects is defined not through official curricula, but the choices and organisation of textbooks. Consequently, it is relevant to understand how the PFL textbooks are structured and what theoretical and methodological framework they advocate.

### 2.1. The ‘Opening Texts’ of textbooks

In the Portuguese context, the ‘opening texts’ were initially defined and examined by Dionisio (2000) in the context of the teaching of Portuguese as a mother tongue. Dionisio (2000) looked at how the textbooks develop reading competencies, what the authors say about it, and what kind of communities of readers they improve for the students.

The ‘opening texts’ usually present the methodological foundations that guide the choices of linguistic inputs (texts, images, graphics, etc.), the socio-cultural choices, and also the methodological guidelines that motivate their organisation and selection of learning strategies and activities. For this reason, they should be a central element in the analysis of the textbooks to understand the practices of textual construction contained therein. However, language teaching researchers continue to neglect to highlight and investigate them.

### 3. Research design

#### 3.1. The textbook corpus: object of study

For this study, the selection of textbooks includes only the textbooks published in Portugal for the teaching and learning of European Portuguese. The main reason was to try to mitigate aspects already highlighted elsewhere (Guerra, 2020a, 2020b), agreeing with Santos (2020, p. 3865) that, ‘[...] the themes and series of each textbook and related material could be different due to the style of authors, book publishers, geographic regions, ethical background, and even religious understanding’. The same can occur with the theoretical and methodological frame of the textbook related to the teaching and learning of writing. Consequently, the field of the analysis of similar realities can be limited.

These textbooks are usually edited for young adults who desire to learn European PFL in private institutes or university courses in Portugal and across the world. An ID code was added, (reproduced in Table one below) to facilitate the identification of the textbook in the research:

**Table 1. Textbook corpus and ID**

ID	Reference	CEFRL level
TB_A	Carmo, L. (2004). <i>Ola! Como esta? Livro de textos. Curso intensivo de lingua portuguesa</i> . Lisboa: LIDEL.	A1/A2/B1/B2
TB_B	Coelho, L. & Oliveira, C. (2015). <i>Portugues em foco I</i> . Lisboa: LIDEL.	A1/A2
TB_C	Coimbra, I. & Coimbra, O. M. (2011). <i>Novo portugues sem fronteiras 1</i> . Lisboa: LIDEL	A1/A2
TB_D	Dias, A. C. (2011). <i>Entre nos 1. Metodo de portugues para hispanofalantes</i> . Lisboa: LIDEL.	A1/A2
TB_E	Ferreira, A. M. B. & Bayan, H. J. (2011). <i>Na onda do portugues</i> . Lisboa: LIDEL.	A1/A2
TB_F	Kuzka, R. & Pascoal, J. (2014). <i>Passaporte para portugues</i> . Lisboa: LIDEL.	A1/A2
TB_G	Oliveira, C., Ballmann, M. J. & Coelho, M. L. (2006). <i>Aprender portugues I</i> . Lisboa: Texto Editores.	A1/A2
TB_H	Tavares, A. (2012). <i>Portugues XXI. Livro do aluno</i> . Lisboa: LIDEL.	A1

Textbook [TB\_E] does not include an introductory text, and therefore does not refer to how writing activities are introduced and under what model. All the others present the textbook, but only two of them make references to the writing competence: [TB\_B] and [TB\_D].

### 4. Discussion

Results of the analysis show that most of the textbooks do not focus on writing competencies. In general, they put emphasis on oral competencies and do so in the methodological orientations and justification of the manual's structure. Let us observe excerpts of three of the textbooks:

*O Portugues XXI* e um metodo que tem uma preocupacao especial pelo desenvolvimento da compreensao e da expressao oral do aluno em situacoes reais de fala [...]. ([TB\_H], p. 3)

*Portugues XXI* is a method that has a special concern for the development of the student's comprehension and oral expression in real speaking situations [...]. ([TB\_H], p. 3, *our translation*)

Cada uma das unidades foi organizada em areas tematicas e vocabulares associadas ao nível de sobrevivencia. Deste modo, ao iniciar a aprendizagem com este manual, o aprendente ira adquirir uma competencia comunicativa que lhe permitira, nao so formar frases gramaticalmente corretas, mas principalmente interagir com outros falantes, utilizando atos de fala apropriados para cada situacao do quotidiano. ([TB\_G], p. 3)

Each of the units has been organised into thematic and vocabulary areas associated with the level of survival. Thus, by starting to learn with this manual, the learner will acquire a communicative competence that will allow him/her not only to form grammatically correct sentences, but mainly to interact with other speakers, using appropriate speech acts for each daily situation. ([TB\_G], p. 3, *our translation*)

O livro do aluno contem os materiais necessarios a execucao de todas as fases das aulas: desde o pre-ensino, no qual se introduzem o vocabulario e as estruturas novas, a leitura e audicao de textos dialogados, a compreensao na leitura e a producao e interacao orais. E de destacar o espaco dedicado a pronuncia. ([TB\_F], p. 3)

The student book contains the materials needed to carry out all phases of the lessons: from pre-teaching, in which new vocabulary and structures are introduced, to reading and listening to dialogued texts, to reading comprehension and oral production and interaction. Of particular note is the space dedicated to pronunciation. ([TB\_F], p. 3, *our translation*)

Sentences like the ones above give us some examples of what the authors put emphasis on. They attach greater importance to the introduction of and work on, vocabulary and grammatical structures as essential components for developing oral foreign language skills. This is a pattern across all textbooks, putting reading capacities at the service of oral communication (the choice of dialogical genres to present speech acts and contexts for use, etc.) that seems, in itself, to allow for the authors the development of full communicative competence.

[TB\_D] does not mention explicitly the written competence. Like the other textbooks, it refers to the CEFR, as if to mention that it is based on the Council of Europe document (Conselho da Europa, 2001) gives it a certain authority in its choice of contents and strategies. Thus, removing possible doubts about the adequacy of the textbook with current requirements. In the case of this same textbook, they also mention that they emphasize the communicative approach and the contributions of the competence and task-based approach ([TB\_D], p. 3). Yet the table of contents (pp. 4–9), does not include the skill of written production. They include it in intermodal activities such as ‘Listening and writing’, ‘Reflecting and writing’, and ‘Interpreting and writing’, which appear in the manual through symbols explained in the ‘introductory note’ (p. 3). The activities grouped in this typology are, for the most part, not intended to develop writing capacities. For example, in ‘Listening and writing’, the intention in most cases is that the student reproduces sounds he has heard (phonemes, diphthongs, or short sentences); in ‘Reflecting and writing’, the student is asked to fill in gaps to demonstrate a grammatical rule (p. 17) or to conjugate certain verbs (p. 16); and, finally, in ‘Interpret and write’, the student is involved in reading comprehension (answering questionnaires, for example) but is also asked to complete spaces with grammatical items (i.e., prepositions, p. 65). There seems to be a certain lack of consistency in the distribution of these learning activities.

[TB\_B] has already been the focus of analysis (Guerra, 2020b). The manual contains two presentation texts. The ‘Preface’, written by the scientific coordinator of the publication, Professor Joao Malala Casteleiro, is the only one that refers to competence in writing. According to him, the manual is organised to develop the four communicative competencies, in line with communicative approaches, that advocates the development of listening and reading comprehension, as well as oral and written production in a harmonious way (p. 3). The introduction, which is the responsibility of the textbook author, completely excludes written competence in the other textbooks analysed. It

emphasises oral competence and the learning of structures that enable the learning of speaking, oral interaction, and listening in PFL. The results are similar to other studies concerning the lack of learning activities and goals for writing (Rachmijati & Cahyati, 2020; Ramadhana et al., 2019; Teixeira, 2012). Thus, oral production continues to hold a privileged place in the initial learning of a foreign language, as if speaking is the only form of communication and only by developing oral production skills will students be able to increase their other skills.

## 5. Conclusions and Future Research Direction

Bearing in mind the centrality of the textbook in the educational process, this research set out to determine what kind of writing activities are proposed by analysing the discourse of the textbook authors in their introductory texts.

The textbook corpus analysis shares a common theme. They do not attach importance to explaining how the textbook is structured, and/or the methodological choices for the development of the writing competencies. Two books do not have a presentation, at all. Concerning the others, the authors seem to give more importance to the external contextualization of the textbook. They allude to a certain scientific and methodological authority by invoking the CEFR, rather than committing to and framing the choices that only concern them: the textual selection and strategies for the development of the various foreign language skills, which are also described in the CEFR: Listening, speaking, interacting, writing and mediation.

Writing competence is either not addressed by the authors at all, or it is relegated to the background. In this sense, it is not possible to establish through the ‘opening texts’ the goals associated with the teaching of writing. It is also difficult to determine the underlying methodology and the criteria that managed the inclusion of writing activities in the analysed textbooks. Concerning the theoretical-methodological models, it appears that the authors’ strategy for the teaching and learning of a foreign language is still to work with language structures and to have students practise reading and repeating dialogues. Therefore, they perpetuate learning strategies with the purpose to practise fixed language structures as the direct method or audio/oral method defended years ago (*cf.* also Azevedo & Piris, 2018, for similar results in Brazilian textbook contexts).

Further studies are needed. Firstly, it is necessary to try to verify if there are indeed writing activities, even if not mentioned in the ‘opening texts’, replicating the same model as the explanatory study (Guerra, 2020b). Secondly, it is imperative to compare Portuguese textbooks with others printed in countries with a long history of editions for second language learning in foreign countries (e.g., France, United Kingdom), or even with those published in countries like Brazil, that also have an important role in the development of Portuguese teaching around the world. Finally, this study (among the previous ones: Guerra, 2020a, 2020b) demonstrates the necessity to evaluate in-depth the PFL textbooks in order to create a set of methodological recommendations for the development of writing skills.

Despite the array of information available on the Internet, the textbook, with all its good and bad qualities, is unlikely to disappear and will continue to be a central educational resource in remote teaching contexts (namely during and after the SARS-CoV2 pandemic) or e-Learning.

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