



The biography genre: a proposal of work from the rewriting process

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ABSTRACT. This article aims to show a proposal of work with the biography genre together with text revision. It is based on studies related to the teaching-learning process of text production and on the theory of discourse genres (BAKHTIN, 1997). This work made use of 19 compositions by students of the 4th grade of Elementary School (ES) from a private school of Maringá, Paraná State, and counted with the conduction of a survey on the main problems shown; from the results, a series of activities aiming at the learning of the genre referred was proposed.

Keywords: text revision, biography genre, didactic intervention.

Gênero biografia: uma proposta de trabalho a partir da reescrita

RESUMO. Este artigo tem o objetivo de apresentar uma proposta de atividades de reescrita com o gênero biografia em conjunto com a revisão textual. Fundamenta-se em estudos relacionados ao ensino-aprendizagem de produção de texto e na teoria dos gêneros discursivos (BAKHTIN, 1997). Para o trabalho, utilizaram-se 19 produções de alunos do 4^o ano do Ensino Fundamental (EF) de uma escola privada de Maringá, Estado do Paraná, nas quais se realizou o levantamento dos principais problemas apresentados e, com base nos resultados, foi proposta uma série de atividades que visam à aprendizagem do gênero em questão.

Palavras-chave: revisão textual, gênero biografia, intervenção didática.

Introduction

The teaching of text production, according to theories that support the teaching of mother tongues, including that defended by the National Curricular Parameters for Portuguese Language (BRASIL, 1997), should have discourse genres as a basis and be understood as something progressive, in which, within the school environment, the teacher plays the extremely important role of assisting students during revision, through interventions implemented in the text. For this reason, it is important that teachers watch out for the materialization of their revision and, moreover, aim at the continuation of this work, since revising, detecting issues in the text and not providing a real learning from these difficulties bring about a gap to the teaching of the written language.

In face of this context, this article proposes a work with the biography genre together with text revision. It is a proposal of didactic intervention prepared from difficulties faced by elementary school 4th graders in producing the biography genre.

In order to reach the objective defined we organized this article into five sections. In the first one, we discuss the theoretical contributions of

revision and of rewriting. In the second one, we address discourse genres and their relationship with teaching. In the third one, we close the theoretical part with a brief explanation about the biography genre. Then, we contextualize the proposal in the fourth one, and, finally, in the fifth section, we present the activities proposed.

Revision and rewriting in the school

According to official documents that support the teaching of Portuguese Language, text production exercise is a continuous process within which the activity of writing is just one of the steps of the writing process. Thus, the text is always open to revision and to how many rewriting attempts are necessary, in order to improve it.

In the classroom, besides being a reader and an evaluator of the students' text, the teacher takes on the role of collaborator in this process, helping them, through revision, to improve their writing. His or her mediation is "[...] one of the determining factors of the success that the student may have in the process [...]" of writing development (RUIZ, 2010, p. 11).

Garcez (1998) explains that text production, understood as an interactive activity,

[...] is based on the assumption that knowledge is mediated by the more developed peer, who serves as a temporary and adjustable support, operating in a zone that is sensitive to learning and that leads the student to use strategies independently [...] (GARCEZ, 1998, p. 42),

thus reaching, as Vygotsky (2007) states, the real development.

Applying Vygotsky's¹ theory to the teaching of text production, we can take teachers, with their mediating role, as active subjects in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), becoming decisive in the construction of the subject as an author. Their work with the student goes through the whole process of writing, ranging from planning to rewrite the text, but becomes even more essential during revision, a moment at which, through their comments, they help the student to seek for possible mistakes, preparing him or her for rewriting. For such a purpose, teachers and students

[...] must learn to detect points where that which is said is not that which was intended, that is, to identify issues in the text and to apply linguistic knowledge to solve them (BRASIL, 1997, p. 55).

Jesus (2001) points out, however, that revising the text is not cleaning it up, that is, 'cleaning' grammatical deviations and replacing the student's text for the teacher's. In this sense, just as in the pre-writing phase,

[...] revision activities have to take into account the aspects of the genre at hand, in order not to make the mistake of 'homogenizing' the language of the student into something without social reflex (GRILLO, 2002, p. 72).

The revision process also gives teachers the opportunity to recognize the most recurrent textual problems in their classroom. From the diagnosis made at this stage, they can better plan their classes, based on the real needs of students. In this way, revision serves as a meaningful and guiding support tool in the teaching of written language.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider that each genre has certain linguistic and discursive characteristics, that is, aspects linked to the language code that are available to the author, and argumentative aspects linked to its context of production and discursive goal. All of them together must be taken into consideration during revision, as

they are responsible for the construction of the statement. For this exact reason, in the next section, we discuss relevant aspects for the production of our proposal of intervention, considering discourse genres as a teaching and learning object.

Discourse genres and teaching

According to Bakhtin (1997), language is a social phenomenon that takes place through utterance, generating, as its product, the statement. These statements, however, are not a set of linguistic and grammatical elements realized isolatedly. They are located in a particular socio-historical context, and have as protagonist an utterer that produces the text according to his or her interlocutor, in a dialogical relationship that always seeks a responsive position.

These subjects interact and act in various social spheres - religious, political, family etc. - and, in each one of them, certain discourse genres circulate, that is, "[...] relatively stable types of utterances" (BAKHTIN, 1997, p. 280). They are "[...] families of texts that share some common characteristics, though heterogeneous" (BRASIL, 1997, p. 23). Discursive spheres determine the conditions and the purposes of the text produced, by means of the thematic content, of the style and of the compositional construction of the text, elements that characterize discourse genres.

In Bakhtin's view, the thematic content comprises the common themes of each sphere that are interesting to the individuals who circulate within it. In the religious sphere, for instance, there are themes related to faith, which probably does not occur in the medical sphere. The compositional construction concerns the organization and the particular structure of each genre. Some genres require a more rigid structure, such as requests and academic texts, while others are more flexible, such as literary ones. The third characteristic element of discourse genres, the stylistic act, refers to the selection of linguistic elements (lexical, phraseological, grammatical and discursive), characteristic of a certain discourse genre. It is also possible that the utterer leaves his or her personal style in the statement. This can be perceived mainly by the particular manner of developing the theme. The lower the degree of formality of the genre, the more prone it will be to personal marks.

According to Bakhtin (1997), discourse genres are divided into two types: primary genres are those more spontaneously constituted, like a dialogue between friends or family members; the secondary ones, in turn, "[...] arise in more complex and comparatively highly developed and organized cultural communication (primarily written) [...]"

¹ According to the author, the learning process is made up of three levels: the actual development level (ADL) is that already consolidated by the individual in order to make him or her capable of solving situations in an autonomous way; the potential development level (PDL) is that in which the subject can perform tasks with the aid of another person. In between these two levels, there is the Zone of Proximal Development, which comprises "[...] those functions that have not matured yet, but are in the process of maturing, functions that will mature" (VYGOTSKI, 2007).

(BAKHTIN, 1997, p. 282), which are the ones that need to be taught in schools.

Working with discourse genres in the classroom, more than being a legal advice, should allow students to develop language practices in order to offer them a real participation in society.

In addition, the work with genres in education is justified for several reasons: (a) it makes room for integrating reading and writing practice, in addition to linguistic analysis, which are commonly fixed in basic school curricula; (b) it allows the materialization of a formation ideal aiming at the full exercise of citizenship (considering the use of texts with effective social circulation from different social spheres and practices); (c) it enables the materialization of an enunciation perspective for Portuguese classes, which means a perspective that takes into account the situated knowledge, the language effectively being used, the work with plural and multimodal texts and practices; (d) it can handle discursive notions as well as notions that are eminently cultural or linguistic/enunciative, all necessary for the subject's literacy and for the proper comprehension of the genre itself (HILA, 2009).

Completing these justifications on the importance of working with genres in the classroom, Dolz; Gagnon; Decândio (2010) argues that the genre, as well as being a cultural instrument, since it mediates linguistic interactions between individuals, it is also a didactical instrument, "[...] because it acts as a means of articulation between social practices and school objects" (DOLZ; GAGNON; DECÂNDIO; 2010).

Specifically, the genre featured in this article, biography, is commonly found in our everyday lives – on the Internet, in books, news, newspapers and in many other means of communication. It is always present in textbooks, not only when we work with biography. Usually, we find boxes next to poems, songs, short stories, which bring brief biographies of authors, providing information. That is the genre we will address in the next section.

The biography genre

The path between the first texts recognized as biographical and the famous and controversial contemporary biographies is quite long and inconstant. This, certainly, is not a genre that has remained stable, neither in relation to its characteristics and objectives, nor to its acceptability by readers and critics.

Through a brief trip to the Western world, we find, in the fifth century BC already, in Ancient Greece, narratives about characters of social representation, such as magistrates, politicians and

even soldiers. In the fourth century BC, Greek-Latin authors, such as Plutarch, sought in illustrious figures of society examples of life, even if idealized, so that these biographies served as examples of life for Roman citizens. Taking a leap in time, we come to the Middle Ages, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, time when biographical texts were composed almost in their entirety of hagiographies, biographies about the lives of saints. According to Dosse (2009 apud VIEIRA, 2011, p. 24), in these types of biographies, the authors emphasize "[...] human incarnations of the sacred and aspire to make them exemplary for the rest of mankind [...]", an intention that is very close to that of Greeks and Latinos.

The biographies of the sixteenth century also show an appreciation for the individual, but a little differently. If until the Renaissance the biography or the biographee were used as an example of life to be followed, from that period, the personality was shown so that individuality was highlighted. If the widespread thinking was that "[...] all people are born free and have equal rights [...]" (SCHMIDT, 2003, p. 59), why not to extol life with a particular focus?

Conversely, in the nineteenth century, Sociology, already recognized as a science, defended the observation and the study of collective life. The decay of biographical texts then began, "[...] since selecting an individual within the mass of men who has made and who make history seemed 'arbitrary', and even 'dangerous'" (MOTTA, 2000, p. 2, emphasis added). However, already in contemporary times, we had a new rise of the biography genre in the publishing industry. Many of them even joined the list of best-sellers, much due to the "[...] voyeurism and the eagerness to know the intimacy of famous people" (MOTTA, 2000, p. 8).

As we can see, the history of biography reinforces Bakhtin's theory on the 'relative' stability of genres. Over time, it suffered transformations, changing mainly the author's intention to produce the text and the type of biographee.

However, although the characteristics of genres, including biography, are not watertight, in general, we can systematize them as follows, according to Carvalho; Silva; Silva (2010):

All of the characteristics listed will serve as support for the activities we will propose in the next section to work the biography genre.

Contextualizing the proposal

As already pointed out, text production work involves several steps, ranging from planning to rewrite. In this context, however, we prioritize the revision step.

Table 1. Didactic model of the biography genre.

Context of production	Author: literary, historians, researchers and even fans; Social sphere: literary, artistic, academic and advertising; Circulation: internet, magazines, books; Objective: to disseminate the story of people, usually public ones; Interlocutor: historians, researchers, enthusiasts, fans.
Thematic content	A person's life story.
Compositional construction	Title Part 1: presentation (description) of the subject of the biography; Part 2: narration of the most remarkable facts of his or her life; Part 3 (living biographee): the biographee's aspirations, desires and plans. In the first and second part, other characters may appear, such as parents, children, friends and others. However, they cannot receive more attention than the protagonist does.
Stylistic marks	Use of the third person (he/she); Type of discourse: narration and description; Use of pronominal and nominal anaphora; Predominance of adverbs, prepositional, coordinative and subordinative phrases; Tense: use of present and future tense, with the predominance of simple past and past perfect; No use of modals, in order to maintain impartiality; Use of adjectives; Use of time textual organizers as 'in', 'during' ...

Source: Carvalho et al. (2010).

We understand that this stage of production, when performed by the teacher, in addition to providing feedback to students on their text, can serve as an instrument of recognition of learning difficulties. Possessing the productions already revised, the teacher has in his or her hands a picture of the most frequent problems in the texts and can, from this, stimulate learners through various means, to perform the analysis of the text produced, taking into consideration the characteristics of the discourse genre.

Thus, we propose a linguistic analysis work interspersed between the stages of revision and rewriting, which begins in the comments left by the teacher in the revision, goes through the survey of the main difficulties presented in the construction of the genre, and comes to the application of activities that promote a reflection on the problems encountered, leading to the student's maturation concerning the biography genre and, consequently, to a more founded rewriting.

For our proposal, we used 19 biographies produced by ES I 4th graders from a private school of Maringá, Paraná State, in which we highlighted the most recurrent problems. Based on the textual revision done by the teacher of the class and, given the results, we proposed a series of activities that aim to solve or at least mitigate these difficulties.

The genre proposed by the teacher was biography, worked prior to production, by different means. First, the teacher presented the children a biographic movie and then began the work with the textbook 'Coleção mais cores – 4º ano' (KNOPIK, 2009), Chapter 7, entitled 'Quem escreve história também tem história' [Who writes a story has a story too].

The chapter begins by showing the importance of learning more about the lives of other people,

especially of the authors. To better explain, it brings the biography of the author Ruth Rocha and an interview with Ziraldo, followed separately by exercises involving interpretation and identification of points that characterize both genres. Then, it presents an exercise, proposing students to choose an adult, and making a suggested interview. The questions pre-defined in the book were: 'What is his/her full name? Where and when was he/she born? In what city does he/she currently live? Is he/she married? To whom? Does he/she have children? Who are they? How old is he/she? What is his/her profession? Where does he/she work? For how long? What is the importance of his/her work to others? What does he/she like to do when he/she is not working? Name one or more milestones in his/her life. What is your opinion on this person?' Finally, as a proposal of text production, it asks, supported on the interview conducted, for the student to write a biography about the person chosen.

Of all the problems encountered in the texts composed by the students, the most frequent ones related to spelling and punctuation, even because the students are on average nine years old. However, as our focus is the production of the biography genre, we were concerned about the problems related to its production. Thus, having disregarded the problems that were not of our interest due to our goal, we highlighted the most recurrent ones, according to the characteristic element of the genre.

1) Relating to the thematic content:

- lack of information contained in the interview;
- the text talks more about the life of secondary characters than of the protagonist;
- failure to identify the main character.

- 2) Relating to the compositional structure:
- no title (is part of the presentation of the character);
 - no conclusion.

- 3) Relating to style:
- excessive use of personal pronouns;
 - use of the first person instead of the third person.

From this result, we came up with the activities proposed, which seek to lead the student to reflect about the construction of the biography genre. Both exercises and the texts that are part of it were chosen taking into account the age and the grade of the learners.

In the first part of the proposal, we seek to work out the context of production of the text. In the second one, we propose exercises linked to the thematic content. The last two parts concern compositional construction and style, consecutively.

It is noteworthy that our purpose is not to offer a finished and sealed recipe for working the genre that should be followed as if it were a formula that is adequate to everybody. We just intend to suggest some exercises that can help in the teaching-learning process of biography and, above all, to emphasize the importance of using revision as a tool to generate the production of rewriting activities.

Proposal of activities

Context of production

We start this proposal with activities that stimulate students to think about the entire context that involves the production of a biography. It is important that they understand that when we write a biographical text, as well as other genres, we need to plan it considering some elements: What should be written? Why? To whom? How? Where? When?

Although the biographies produced have had as circulation only the school universe, we prepared questions that draw the student's attention to the presence of this genre in society as a whole, so that, in this way, the text becomes less artificial.

1) ORAL OR WRITTEN QUESTIONS

- a) Have you ever read the biography of someone? Of whom did it speak?
- b) What do you most remember about the biography read?
- c) Where can biographies be found?

<input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor	<input type="checkbox"/> Packages
<input type="checkbox"/> Comics	<input type="checkbox"/> Pamphlets
<input type="checkbox"/> Websites	<input type="checkbox"/> Books

- d) Why do authors write biographies?
 - ☐ To disclose the more remarkable facts of their lives.
 - ☐ To disclose the most remarkable facts of one's life.
- e) Who usually likes to read biographies?
- g) What should we do before starting a biographical text?

2) Let's help Ana?

Ana is a very curious girl and loves to learn more about the lives of famous people. She has already read the biographies of the author Ruth Rocha, of the composer Vinícius de Moraes, the one who wrote "*Lá vem o pato, pato aqui, pato acolá...*", and of the painter Tarsila do Amaral. She finds the *Abaporu* picture painted by Tarsila funny.

Today, on the bus, as she was coming home, the girl heard a woman talking to her friend about a super funny actor, Charles Chaplin. The woman said that the actor's movies were mute, but even so, caused much laughter.

As soon as she got home, the girl tried to turn on her computer to find Chaplin's biography, but her computer was not working. Ana, impatient as she is, went after Chaplin's biography elsewhere. The problem is that she does not know well where to start looking.

Let's help her?

Text created by the authors

Underline the places you think Ana can find a biography.

Bookstore - Bakery - Newsstand - Library - School - Drugstore - Church - Electronics Store - Antiquarian Bookshop - Post office - Clothing store - Stationery store.

⇒ Do you remember somewhere else?

Thematic content

In relation to the thematic content, the main problems were lack of information on the biographee and deviation from the focus, the life of the biographee. Even though the students had as support for the production an interview conducted with the main character, many texts failed to provide some important data on him or her, which may compromise the quality of the biography.

In other cases, students started the text writing about the biographee, but ended up describing more his or her children or parents.

We intended, with these activities, to show students that, although a biography brings other

characters linked to the protagonist, the biggest goal is to discuss about the latter.

1) Imagine the following situation:

A friend tells you he/she is reading a book on the life of a very nice person. You, after hearing that, gets very curious and feels like learning more about that character. Insert an 'X' in the most important pieces of information that you would like to learn:

Full name	
Age	
Marital status	
Husband or wife's name	
Spouse's profession	
Does he or she have children?	
What do his or her children do in their free time?	
His or her profession	
His or her hobby	
Phone	
Address	
His or her pets	
His or her professional aspirations	
Parents' names	
Parents' personal information	
Boss' name	

⇒ Apart from those ones, are there any other information that would be important in a biography? Which ones?

2) Highlight in 'green' the information you judge to be the most relevant of the biography described below, and in 'red' those that can be excluded, without prejudice to the biography presented.

<p>"Chico 'Sorriso'" [Smiley Chico], the greatest Brazilian humorist</p> <p>Francisco Anysio de Oliveira Paula Filho, better known as Chico Anysio, was born in Maranguape, Ceará, on April 12, 1931. At the age of six, he moved to Rio de Janeiro, city where the Christ the Redeemer statue and the Sugarloaf mountain are located.</p> <p>Chico had eight children, seven men and one woman. His son Bruno Mazzeo, just as some of his siblings, followed his father's career and became a very recognized comedian.</p> <p>Chico worked as a radio broadcaster, a commentator, but stood out as a writer and a humorist. One of his best-known characters is Teacher Raimundo. This character worked in a school and had many crazy students, like Rolando Lero, Galeão Cumbica and João Cana Brava. Another student of 'Escolinha do Professor Raimundo' [Teacher Raimundo's School] was Galeão Cumbica, a character who was always dressed as an aeronautics pilot.</p> <p>Chico Anysio died on March 23, 2012, at 80.</p>

Now answer the following questions:

- Who is the main character of this biography?
- Write down the information that is not essentially linked to the life of Chico Anysio.
- Why, in a biography, we should not focus 'much' on the life of secondary characters?

⇒ Rewrite the text, doing the necessary adjustments, excluding information you judged less important in the biography.

⇒ Which of the two versions is best suited for a biography of the comedian Chico Anysio? Why?

3) Form a group with four classmates and try to guess whose biography is this.

Extract from the biography	Who am I?
... was born on March 27, 1963, in Santa Rosa, RS. It broadcasts a TV show on Sundays for youths, but for a long time dedicated his career to children. She is known as "the children's queen".	
Edson Arantes do Nascimento was a player for the national football team in the 70s. Because of his skills at football, he became known as "the king of football".	
... was born in Brazil, in the year that our country was the champion of the Football World Cup. He began his career at a young age as an actor, a singer and a dancer. He got married in 2007 to the actress Maria, with whom he had a few children.	
... is a country male singer of great success today. He was born in Campo Grande, MS, but lived in Londrina for a long time. He is known as one of the greatest teen singers of the moment and is very successful with the girls. One of his greatest hits is the song <i>Meteoro</i> .	

⇒ **Did you realize the importance of the information in the biography?**

When reading a biographical text, the reader seeks to learn about the protagonist as much as possible; for this reason, the author must do a survey of all his or her life and choose what is most important.

⇒ Do a short biography yourself about somebody in the room. Think: is the information you have enough for your colleagues to find out the name of the biographee?

4) Let's make the phrases more detailed. To do so, use the information contained in the chart.

Peter works in a store.

since last year – clothing store - da Silva – for children - my mother's brother - at the mall.

Cristina was born in Curitiba.

Santos - on - but - August 15 - Maringá - 10 years - since - from 1990 - live - in.

Tereza is a teacher.

graduated from Pedro Aguiar School - Pereira dos Santos - Portuguese - She - two years ago.

Compositional construction

Overall, the texts do not have many structural problems. Even so, we bring in this section activity that can provide the learner a better understanding of the structure of a biography.

⇒ Read the biography of one of the most famous children's writers.

Ziraldo's biography

Ziraldo Alves Pinto was born in Caratinga, Minas Gerais, on October 24, 1932.

Though he did not have a degree in Journalism, he worked a lot in this area. Besides being a journalist, Ziraldo is a painter, a cartoonist, a playwright and a writer.

His first children's book was *Flicts*, but his greatest success came in 1980, when he published *O menino maluquinho* [The Nutty Boy]. The story pleased so much that it was turned into a movie, a website, a play, a video game and even an opera, in addition to leading the author to be granted the *Jabuti* Award by the Brazilian Book Chamber. After *The Nutty Boy*, other books came, like *Uma professora muito maluquinha* [An Extremely Nutty Teacher], *O bebê maluquinho* [The Nutty Baby] and *Diário da Julieta* [Juliet's Diary].

For four years now, the author has been engaged with a series of books entitled *Os galactomeninos de Ziraldo* [Ziraldo's Galactic Boys], each volume tells the story of a boy from a planet. Four titles have been published so far, including *O menino da lua* [The Moon Boy] and *O menino da Terra* [The Earth Boy].

The father of The Nutty Boy plans to publish six more books of this series

Text created by the authors

1) Number the text paragraphs

2) Match the first column, which marks the paragraph number, with the second one, which shows what the paragraph is about. In the same paragraph, there may be more than one type of information.

(1st)

(2nd) () Biographee's aspirations.

(3rd) () Biographee's description.

(4th) () Narration of his most remarkable facts.

(5th)

3) How would the text be if we inverted this text order?

⇒ Let's see how it would look like if the biography began with Ziraldo's aspirations:

Ziraldo's biography

The father of The Nutty Boy plans to release six more books of Ziraldo's Galactic Boys series

⇒ What if we began the biography by narrating the facts of his life? Let's see how it looks like?

Ziraldo's biography

The first children's book by Ziraldo was *Flicts*, but his greatest success came in 1980 when he published *The Nutty Boy*. The story pleased so much that it was turned into a movie, a website, a play, a comic book, a video game and even an opera, in addition to leading the author to be granted the *Jabuti* Award by the Brazilian Book Chamber.

a) Comparing the versions of Ziraldo's biography, which one you believe to be clearer? Why?

b) Is it important, before we learn what happened in a person's life and his or her personal and professional dreams, that we learn his or her full name, age and other details about him or her?

() No. Personal information is not so important.

() Yes, because then we know who the biography will talk about.

4) Which of the following are part of the biographee's description?

Full name	Yes	No
Place where he/she was born		
His/her works		
His/her moments of joy		
When he/she was born		
Name of his/her parents		
His/her trips		
Civil status		
Children's name (if any)		
His/her education background		
His/her dreams		

⇒ Is it nice to know the facts that marked the life of a person that interests us? Why?

⇒ Why do biography readers find it interesting to know what the protagonist of the text would like to do in the future?

1) Imagine that you come to a bookstore and find this book wrapped in plastic, on the biographies shelf (Figure 1):

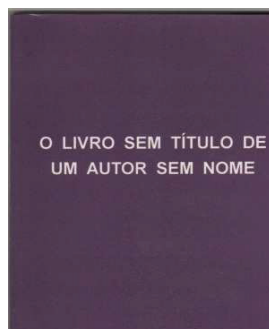


Figure 1. [The untitled book by an unnamed author].

2) Would you buy this book even without knowing about whom it narrates? Why?

3) Why is the title important in the book or on the page on which the biography is written?

4) What if I wrote a biography entitled *The biography of my mother*? If they did not know me, would readers know about whom I am going to talk?

4) Why would that happen?

5) Let's change that title?

The biography of _____. (Substitute the word mother)

The _____ of Marina Sampaio. (Substitute the word biography)

Marina Sampaio, _____. (Use one or two words that define the character)

Style

The largest number of problems in the texts related to style, understood by Bakhtin (1997) as a set of discursive-linguistic marks that characterize a particular genre. For this reason, we treat them separately.

Use of the first verbal person

Although the textbook used by the group has presented, in the unit worked, the correct use of the verbal person in the biography, it does not bring something essential: the comparison between biography and autobiography genres, which have very similar characteristics, with the almost exclusive difference that the former uses the third person, and the latter the first person.

This work is necessary so that students understand that it is not only about a rule that must be followed, but, above all, realize that a wrong choice compromises his or her text, confusing his or her reader, who may not understand whether the text narrates the life of the author or of somebody else.

Thus, we rely essentially on this comparison to propose activities related to this problem, even

because this was one of the greatest difficulties of the class.

1) Read and compare the two texts:

Text 1:

I, Antonio Gonçalves da Silva, son of Pedro Gonçalves da Silva and Maria Pereira da Silva, was born here, in the farm called Serra de Santana, which is three leagues farm from the city of Assaré. [...]. When I turned eight, I lost my father and had to work hard together with my older brother to provide for the younger ones, as we faced complete poverty. At the age of twelve, I attended a very backwards school, where I studied for four months, but without interrupting much my job as a farmer [...].

Text 2:

José Bento Monteiro Lobato was born on April 18, 1882 in the city of Taubaté. Son of farmer José Marcondes Bento Lobato and lady Olímpia Augusta Monteiro Lobato, he was, besides and inventor and the greatest Brazilian children's literature writer, one of the most interesting characters in the recent history of the country.

Text extract (ROSCHER, 2008).

Questions about text 1:

a) To which genre does the first text belong?

() Autobiography () Advertisement ()

Biography

b) Why do we write a text like that?

c) Who is the author of that text?

d) Take from the text a phrase that shows who the author is.

e) Who is the main character of that text?

() Pedro da Silva.

() Antônio Gonçalves da Silva.

Questions about text 2:

a) What was the author's purpose in writing text 2?

b) About whom the text is talking?

c) Is the protagonist himself who is telling his story? How can we see that?

d) Is the genre of text 2 the same as that of text 01? What does mark the difference?

Reflecting on the texts:

We realize that the author and the main character of text 1 are the same person. Thus, we have a person narrating his own life, that is, an autobiography.

See how the text begins:

'I, Antônio Gonçalves da Silva [...] 'was' born here in the farmer called Serra de Santana [...]

⇒ If we wanted to write a 'biography' of Antônio Gonçalves da Silva, using the same information, how would that phrase be?

⇒ Separate the verbs that are in the table below: those you could use to write about yourself, and those you would use to write about someone else.

(He/she) was raised	(I) graduated	(I) studied
(I) met	(He/she) lived	(I) traveled
(He/she) married	(He/she) had	(I) had

I					
He/she					

⇒ Which of these verb forms could be used in a biography?

2) Read the text:

The life of Roseli

Roseli was born in São Paulo, on 23 October, 1972. Now Roseli is married to 'my father', Miranda. 'My father' and 'my mother' have three children, the oldest one is Igor, who is 12 years old, the middle one is Yudi, who is 9 years old, and the youngest one is Camilla, who is 5 years old.

Currently, Roseli lives in Maringá, Paraná. Roseli has a business that sells gas, water, ice, drinks and coal. My father and my mother work together.

Text based on the production of one of the students.

- About whom this text talks?
- Look at the underlined words. Who is talking?
- Who are Roseli and Miranda's children?
- Is that text a biography or an autobiography? How can we prove it?

3. Place the number 1 within the parenthesis if the phrase appears to be part of a biography, and (2) if it appears to belong to an autobiography.

- () Paul studied Chemical Engineering in Goiás.
 () Miriam traveled to several countries, including Australia.
 () Last year, I spent my vacation at my grandmother's house in Florianópolis.
 () In his spare time, Saul likes to do exercises, especially swimming.

Did you understand?

- When we are producing a 'biography', that is, telling about the life of another person, we use the third verbal person: 'he, she or they'.
- In the 'autobiography', as we are talking about ourselves, we use the first person: 'I'.
- Verbs also have to be conjugated properly, according to the person used.

⇒ Rewrite the text *The Life of Roseli*, adapting it to the biography genre.

Excessive use of the personal pronoun 'he or she'.

One of the difficulties of children in this phase is referral. Students always hear that we should not repeat too much the same words in the text, but we often fail to explain how to refer to something or to someone without repeating its/his/her name. For this reason, students exhaustively repeat the personal pronoun 'it/he/she'.

We intend, with this proposal, to show that we can refer to the same object in different ways without using only the name or the pronoun.

- Answer the questions:
 - What is your name? _____
 - Do you have nicknames? _____
 - Do your parents or grandparents ever call you by any other name? _____
 - Does your mother have more than one way to call you? _____
 - How would you call her without using the word 'mother'? _____

⇒ When referring to a person or thing, we can use different words. Those words can come from a characteristic, from personality, from the profession, from something the person likes to do, or even from synonymous words.

⇒ Another way to replace a name or location is by using pronouns.

⇒ See how many different ways we can refer to the city of Maringá:

Yesterday, my mother and I went to 'Maringá'.
 'It' is a well-wooded city.

Moreover, 'the green city' has colorful gardens.
 We found 'the musical city' very beautiful.

'We make these substitutions to avoid the repetition of words in the text'.

The other day I was reading a book that had a super funny character. I forgot her name, but I recall some of the references to her. Can you help me remember the name of this character? She is:

- a doll;
 - talkative;
 - Narizinho's friend;
 - is a resident of Sítio do Picapau Amarelo.
- I'm speaking of _____
- Now it is your turn:

Pick a classmate and use some ways to replace his or her name to describe him or her to your other classmates. Let's see if the class finds out who he or she is?

But remember: when choosing a name to replace the original one, be careful not to offend the person. Sometimes we give a nickname that annoys the other person. So pay attention when making your choice.

1) In the chart below, we have several words that can replace the name of the biographee. Try to fit those words into the spaces in the text.

actor, Didi, a comedian, Renato, he

Do you know Renato Aragão?

Renato Aragão, _____, was born in Ceará, in Sobral, on January 13, 1936. At 25, newly graduate in Law, _____ joined a contest held by TV Ceará to work as a type of show director, editor and producer. That's when it all started, because _____ won, proved that he was the guy and pretty soon was already working as an actor.

To _____, his greatest satisfaction is having increasingly faithful and kind fans, whom he considers responsible for all this success.

Text created by the authors.

4) Read the biography and answer the questions:

The Story of Rosa Gomes

She is a teacher. She is called Rosa Gomes. She is the daughter of Antônio da Silva Gomes and Maria Rosa Gomes. She has two siblings.

She was born in Altônia, on December 12, 1981.

She is married to João Batista Monteiro Tonim. She has no children.

Text based on the production of one of the students.

a) In the text, the author repeated a word many times. Which word?

b) Let's try to re-elaborate the text, excluding some of those repeated words?

To do so, we can use two ways studied: either we substitute it with another word, or we use only the verb (in Portuguese).

Think about some questions that can help:

- What is the biographee's full name?
- Do people always call her by her full name?
- What is her profession?

Re-elaborating the text:

5) Dominoes.

'Instructions': Sit with a classmate. Mix the dominoes and hand out three to each one; the rest should be reserved. If somebody does not have a piece, take one from the reserved ones. The players must match the person ('I' or 'he') with the proper verb forms. Who runs out of pieces first, wins.

Was born	(I) lived	(He) studied	(I) have	(He) traveled	(I) was raised	(He) has
I	He	I	He	I	He	I

(He) lived	(I) was born	(I) traveled	(He) likes	(I) practice	(He) Goes out	(I) dance
I	He	He	I	He	I	He

Did you notice?

Often, just by how the verb is conjugated, we can learn who the subject of the text is. Thus, in the biography, for instance, we do need to repeat several times the word 'he' or 'she' to state something about somebody. In the phrase '(he/she) 'Studied' in Dr. Gastão Vidigal School, it is clear, only with the verb 'studied', that we are talking about somebody that has already been mentioned in the text, that is, 'he' or 'she'².

All these activities presented herein served as support so that we established the work with rewriting not only through the teacher's correction, but mainly by trying to take into consideration the most frequent problems of students, as well as characteristic elements of the genre biography.

Final considerations

Throughout this article, we sought to provide the teacher with a proposal with several activities linked to the context of production, to the thematic content, to the compositional construction and to the style of the biography genre.

Our intention, however, was not to create a complete guide appropriate for all students. We defend that, given the vivacity of the language

² In Portuguese, in general, we do not have to precede the verb by a personal pronoun due to the way verbs are conjugated, which does not happen in English. That is why the personal pronouns in English had to be made explicit between brackets. Note that the dominoes game that has been proposed would not work with English-speaking students.

and the diversity of its members, educators should suit this proposal to their own reality. For such a purpose, they can make use of textual revision, a resource that, in addition to offering a feedback to students on their text, it becomes an important methodological tool, since, through it, teachers can have an overview of all difficulties that authors face in the construction of the genre.

We did not have the intention to exhaust all possibilities of working with biography. On the contrary, we just paved a way that certainly can be widened not only for this genre but for many others that are part of the social practice of our students.

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