Teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language as Cultural Diplomacy: Brazilian Culture Tasks

Davi Borges de **ALBUQUERQUE***

* PhD in Linguistics at the Universidade de Brasília (UnB). Member of 'Study Group in Ecolinguistics and Imaginary' at the Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG). Contact: albuquerque07@gmail.com.

Abstract:
We discuss in this paper the concept of Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) teacher as a cultural diplomat and discuss the theoretical and methodological aspects of teaching practice of the foreign language teacher. It is pointed out the concepts of approach, methods and techniques as well. Furthermore, we describe a task to work Brazilian culture in PFL class. This task is in accordance with the theories discussed here. Thus, the objective of this text is twofold: first, to defend the idea of the foreign language teacher as a cultural diplomat; second, present the task example to illustrate the assumptions we follow. After the introduction, we discussed the conception of PFL teacher as a cultural diplomat, in (1); we present the theories of teacher-researcher, action research and active methodologies, as well as the notions of approach, method and techniques, in (2); we describe a task is used in our course syllabus, called 'Brazilian themes', and some suggestions for developing it, in (3). In our final remarks, in addition to returning to central ideas, we point out the importance of support, from private and public initiatives, to PFL teacher.

Keywords:
Portuguese as a Foreign Language. Cultural diplomacy. Brazilian culture.

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INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese language is the sixth most spoken language in the world, with about 200 million speakers (CARVALHO; LUCCHESI, 2016). It is the official language of Brazil and seven other countries: Portugal, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde, Mozambique and Timor-Leste. These countries form the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP).

After economic and financial crises at the beginning of the 21st century, Brazil stood out on the international scenario. This enhanced interest by citizens of different countries in learning Portuguese as a Foreign language. In addition, Brazil influence on international relations, especially in the MERCOSUR and the BRICS. Furthermore, globalization, the internet, smartphones, software and applications, the processes of merging languages   and expanding relationships, to sum up, cyberculture has altered the entire process of teaching and learning foreign languages   (LEFFA, 2016), as well as searching and demands by foreign language learners. Thus, Portuguese became more valued at international level and again Brazil distinguishes itself.

The following data and projects illustrate the increase in this demand. Castro Neto (2013, p. 18) corroborates our statement in this text, presenting the increasing numbers for the proficiency exam in Brazilian Portuguese, called 'Certificado de Proficiência em Língua Portuguesa para Estrangeiros' (Celpe-Bras), elaborated by 'Ministério da Educação' (the Ministry of Education – MEC): "jumped from 127 enrolled in the first edition of the exam in 1997 to more than 9,000 in 2012". The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE) and the Itamaraty Cultural and Educational Department (DCED) maintain the 'Lecturer Program for Foreign Institutions', which annually sends among 10 to 20 Portuguese language, Brazilian Literature and Brazilian Culture professors to different universities throughout the world. Further, there are some actions conducted by 'Rede Brasil Cultural', under the responsibility of the MRE.

Successful examples are much larger at the academic level, such as: departments, research groups, courses and projects. We will mention some of them. There is the 'International Society of Portuguese as a Foreign Language' (SIPLE), which has a regular journal and congress that contribute greatly to all kinds of professionals who work with Portuguese as a Foreign Language (henceforth PFL), the Center for Languages and Interculturality (CELIN) of the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), which has the projects of 'Multiliteracy in the context of teaching PFL', 'Production and evaluation of teaching materials for teaching PFL', 'Studies and practices related to the Celpe-Bras proficiency exam' and 'Development of resources for teaching and learning PFL in the distance modality'. In addition, there are positive experiences of teaching PFL in immersion, at the Federal University of Uberlândia, as reported by Yamamoto (2014) and Chagas (2016), the Center for Teaching and Researching in Portuguese for Foreigners (NEPPE), at the University of Brasília, and various courses and projects in progress of some recognized Brazilian universities, which have specific centers for PFL teaching and research[1].

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[1]   This is not an exhaustive list and maybe we could not have mentioned other valuables PFL projects. Besides the items pointed by us, in the last two decades there is a significant growing in publications as well, such: papers, books, events, thesis and dissertations.

However, there are not only positive cases in this expansion of the Portuguese language from the perspective of PFL teaching and linguistic policies. Pacheco (2006) and Almeida Filho (2011) emphasize that in the first decade of the 21st century the training courses for PFL teachers, research and postgraduate centers in this same area were still small and only in a few institutions. Although we have not obtained more recent data, in our opinion and experience as PFL teachers this situation has not yet changed. Furthermore, Borges (2015) points out that the Brazilian government has not prepared any official document on PFL teaching, and also lists the existing official and academic initiatives, emphasizing that Brazilian language policy at the international level is weak until nowadays[2].

It is in this scenario, between positive and negative aspects, that we consider relevant the dissemination of research, task proposals and experience reports regarding PFL. Thus, this text intents to contribute to these issues bringing theoretical reflections to improve the practice of the PFL teacher and a task proposal based on the same reflections pointed earlier. So, we aim to contribute to the area and support other active PFL teachers.

In this article, we discuss the concept of the PFL teacher as a cultural diplomat, presenting some theoretical and methodological aspects of our teaching practice and a task proposal, already employed by us. This task unites theoretical and practical elements adopted by us, as well as discussed in the following sections of this text. Such task also aims to teach basic cultural traits of Brazilian daily life and also to dispel some myths that PFL learners may have.

Thus, in section (1), we discuss the conception of the PFL teacher, and of any foreign language teacher, as a cultural diplomat; in section (2), we present the assumptions that guide our teaching practice, namely: the teacher-researcher, action research and active methodologies, as well as the notions of approach, method and techniques; in section (3), we describe our task proposal and some results and ideas for developing it. Finally, after section (3), we write our final remarks.

PFL Teacher as Cultural Diplomat

The idea of foreign language teacher, specifically the PFL teacher, as a cultural diplomat is defined by Moutinho and Almeida Filho (2015) as the role of the teacher who is not limited to just teaching the target-language, but to become a facilitator, promoting different spaces for using the language and its culture, in line with the interests of students and their active participation in learning. In addition, the teacher, in the role of a diplomat, also ends up learning the language and culture of his students to interact with them in different spaces. Thus, such interaction makes the teacher-student relationship and foreign language learning a positive, friendly and harmonious experience for the learner.

We consider this perspective important for PFL teacher academic training and professional qualification. However, in our view, the relation between foreign language teaching and cultural diplomacy remains understudied by Applied Linguistics researches, even though language teachers already practice different forms of cultural diplomacy cultural, some conscious, others without knowing it[3].

The concept of 'cultural diplomacy' currently consists in practicing cultural cooperation and/ or exchanges between two countries, or a specific group of countries (ANG, ISAR & MAR, 2015), differing from

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[2] Rajagopalan (2013) elaborates an analysis of Brazilian language policy and its criticism.
[3] Moutinho and Almeida Filho (2015) also applied a questionnaire that was responded by three PFL teachers. The questionnaire contained questions about their practices and if they were conscious about their role as cultural diplomats. The results show that the three were aware of the importance of cultural diplomacy in PFL teaching, but only one of them presented tasks and classroom practices aligned with this view. Thus, we claim the importance to develop researches about this theme by applying other questionnaires to PFL teachers and professors, and expanding the number of subjects in order to verify the degree of awareness and how the concept of cultural diplomacy in PFL teaching could affect their classroom practices.

cultural relations, which take place in a natural and organic way, since cultural diplomacy requires government intervention and occurs formally, through agreements between countries and their agents, cultural diplomats (ARDNT, 2006).

Cultural diplomacy is inserted and is related to 'public diplomacy' and 'soft power', as it involves specific agents – cultural diplomats (in our case, teachers, learners, staff) – and also specific assets, namely: culture (in a broad sense).

Public diplomacy is defined as the communication and approximation of a country with the foreign public (WANG, 2011). Thus, we easily perceive that public diplomacy is a notorious concern of some countries, such as the United States, England, France, Japan, South Korea, just to mention a few, while it is not practiced by others. The ways a country can get in touch with the outside public are pointed out by Cull (2008) as being in five: opinion polls, advocacy, exchange diplomacy, international broadcasts and cultural diplomacy. These practices end up being thought of as strategies to better communicate, know and conquer portions of the foreign public.

The term 'soft power' was coined by Nye (1990) to refer to a kind of co-option, that is, the opposite of impositions or orders, usually of a military or economic nature. Thus, individuals co-opted, or conquered, by soft power are willing to do on their own and willingly what the agent of soft power wants them to do. Therefore, the theme of cultural goods and services fits well here. As examples, the North American film and music industries, which end up conquering large audiences and dictating ways of thinking, saying and acting[4].

According to the theoretical assumptions presented above and based on Moutinho & Almeida Filho (2015), PFL teachers are cultural diplomats because they are not limited to teaching grammar or linguistic structures, but, in addition to the target language, these professionals teaches the students cultural aspects, practices interaction in real communicative situations, encourages students to take their interests and aspirations towards the target language to the classroom, learns the local language and culture (when they teach PFL in a foreign country), creating bonds of friendship between both communities, that of Portuguese-speaking and that of students.

PFL teachers during their courses must also point out the advantages of learning Portuguese, presenting the most diverse sectors of these leverages, such as: economy, financial market, business branches, research and universities, among others[5], and that the use Portuguese can offer several opportunities in Portuguese-speaking countries, if the student wishes to visit or reside in one of the countries of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), highlighting: Brazil, as a member of the BRICS; Portugal, as a member of the European community; Angola and Mozambique, as rising economies, being among the top five African countries for investment[6]; and Timor-Leste, a new nation that seeks international support and cooperation.

In this case, the teacher exercises the role of cultural diplomat, also practicing public diplomacy and soft power by bringing the cultural goods and practices of the different Portuguese-speaking countries[7] to the

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[4] Pragmatics and linguistic interactions are themes of some publications about PFL. There are several references on PFL and speech acts (AUSTIN, 1975), mainly analysis on how teaching books approach Pragmatics, if the tasks in PFL classroom involves authentic linguistic data and genuine social interactions (slangs, idiomatic expressions, linguistic variation) and experience reports.

[5] We mention only two advantages, according to Borges (2015). The Portuguese language is one of the most important for United Kingdom for the next two decades, as stated by the report *Languages for the Future*, from *British Council*. The other is the growing demand for teaching Portuguese as a heritage language in countries as England, Spain and United States (SOUZA; BARRADAS, 2013; BORGES, 2015; MORONI; GOMES, 2015).

[6] *Africa Investment Risk Report* 2019 (EXXAFRICA, 2019). This report states that the other three countries are: Ethiopia, Ghana and Mauritania.

[7] Most of PFL teaching books present good lessons about Brazilian and Portuguese cultures, but the remaining Portuguese-speaking countries are not well represented in these publications. Thus, the PFL teacher has to make his/her own teaching material to present for PFL learners the culture from African and Asian countries that speak Portuguese.

knowledge of the students, thus conquering the students and making them become sympathizers of the Portuguese language and culture of different countries.

With that, we do not just want to adopt a theoretical and abstract framework to be used in research, because when we face the PFL teacher as a cultural diplomat, we are emphasizing the importance and responsibility of our practice before ourselves, our students, the institution where we teach and the governments involved. Thus, we also highlight the need for solid training for this type of teacher and the relevance of institutional support (official and academic) for the continuity and good quality of this practice.

PFL TEACHING PRACTICES: THEORETICAL ASPECTS

It is important to delimit some theories and assumptions that guide our teaching practice and on which we base ourselves for daily classes. Thus, we will discuss the educational principles of our teaching practice and, after that, define the scientific terminology, that is, the theoretical aspects used here.

The assumptions that go through our teaching practice are based on the following: the teacher-researcher theory, action research and active methodologies. Thus, in the first aspect, we consider it important to have a good formation and theoretical knowledge by students and teachers, through research, teaching, practicing and assisting students about what scientific research is and how it is done, but without losing sight of the advances in teaching theories and practices (SOARES, 1998; ANDRÉ, 2001). In other words, we always seek to reach a balance between research and teaching, to teach students trained in theory and practice in Portuguese, according to the needs of the class, which is the target learners.

Action research has been shown to be effective in the three pillars of higher education, namely: teaching, research and extension programs, as it makes the teacher's knowledge and practices guided by the needs of the community, or a group of the community, which wants social transformation (FRANCO, 2005), so we must balance theory and practice between the universal and the particular, thinking about case studies of the community and the profile of students (teaching), conducting research in and for the community (research), and disseminate the results and contributions of our practices and research to the community (extension) (TRIPP, 2005). In this way, action research is in line with PFL teaching to highly educated learners, as well as for courses offered by different universities. If the learners and the institution are different from those mentioned (facing the academy), it is up to the teacher to adapt his/her practices based on action research that also proves to be effective, especially with all concern with the theory and practices aimed at the local community. In addition, action research with this interest in the community is in line with the assumptions of cultural diplomacy.

Our main interest in active methodologies is teaching by research (CARVALHO, 2013; CASTELLAR, 2016), as we work with Linguistics concepts and terminology, teaching students to research, search for data, select a methodology, weave the results and, after learning the theoretical aspects through a reflection of their practices, they can adapt what was taught in the classroom to their daily lives[8].

In addition, we present here basic information about approach, teaching methods and techniques, the role of variation and interaction in our practice, and the importance of considering PFL teaching as cultural diplomacy.

Approach is defined as a force or philosophy that guides teacher actions and decisions. These main actions and decisions are planning, elaboration of teaching materials, teaching method choice and students'

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[8] In the last years, researchers are conducting investigations about these teaching methodologies applied to PFL and other theoretical aspects mentioned in this text. Diesel and Carvalho (2019) analyze their PFL teaching experience using active methodologies in Macao. Fernandes and Silva (2019) point out eclectic approach advantages for teaching Portuguese as a heritage language.

evaluation (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1993). As previously stated, we make use of the eclectic approach, which has points in common with the post-method. The eclectic approach consists of flexibility in which the teacher makes "methodological choices that are more coherent and necessary, in view of the teaching-learning context" (VILLAÇA, 2008, p. 82). These choices are made based on the teacher's experience in classroom. In our view, given the approaches limitations and the teaching methods criticisms – whether prescriptive or decontextualized[9] – eclecticism, or 'smart eclecticism' (LEFFA, 2016), when used in a moderate way, without radicalisms or excesses, leads to best solutions to attend to student's needs in everyday situations inside and outside PFL classroom, since the teachers will have freedom of choice and practice to optimize their work and make the teaching-learning process plural[10].

According to Leffa (2016), post-method (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2001, 2006) has features in common with eclecticism, especially its three main elements, which are: the search for teacher autonomy, learning based on projects and tasks, and the proposal for a critical pedagogy.

The search for teacher autonomy can be define as teacher not being tied to theoretical constructs but exercising his autonomy through his own decisions based on his actions, practices and investigations. Learning based on projects and tasks consists in teacher transforming the students into subjects and protagonists of their learning, stimulating them to ask, formulate and test hypotheses, collect data, among other things. The teacher's roles here are a suggestion, guidance and direction for the students. It is worth remembering that critical pedagogy consists in the fact that the student forms knowledge which can be used for social changes and not just purely theoretical and encyclopedic knowledge.

The method is a set of rules, based on the approach and experiences that the teacher has about the students, the classroom and the target language (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1993). In this way, the choice of the method by the teacher is influenced by several factors, but his training and approach are the dominant ones. In accordance with our choices of eclectic and post-method approach, we mainly adopt communicative methods, which are not just one, as Almeida Filho (1993) informs: "but the adoption of broader principles such as the focus on the process, in specific ways of how to learn and how to teach languages " (FRANCO; ALMEIDA FILHO, 2009, p. 18). The objective of communicative methods is the student to acquire the target language, in order to build a speech, carry out consciously appropriate social/cultural actions[11]. Moreover, communicative methods do not neglect grammar teaching (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1993), but they do so aiming at the meaning and relevance of messages, in real life language use, reducing the use of grammatical nomenclature, showing tolerance when the student uses his L1 and trying to interpret deviations by not seeing them as errors.

We believe that communicative methods, in addition to being in agreement with our eclectic and post-method approach, give space for the student to learn the language in a free and conscious way, inserted in its real, social and cultural use, which makes learning easier and stimulating. Furthermore, communicative methods are the ones that most take into account language variation, functional, interactional and cultural aspects.

As we will explain better in the next section, our lesson plans are task-based and content-based. These lesson plans main objective is to teach students to interact in Portuguese, in the most different situations

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[9] Brown (2001) and Larsen-Freeman (2003) present these critics in a systematic way.

[10] Although Leffa (2016) considers eclecticism a valid choice for teachers, he also calls attention to criticisms to this option, such Barasch and James (1994), affirming that to conciliate opposite ideas is a kind of 'intellectual obscenity'. Almeida Filho (1993) states that conflicting actions may exist in eclectic approach, but they are solved in teaching practice, since reflections and ruptures may have proactive and retroactive effects on teachers' ideas. We agree with Almeida Filho's opinion, since in teaching practice there are no contradictories ideas, but different strategies and solutions for several classroom situations in order to assist students learning.

[11] Almeida Filho (2005) elaborates a communicative proposal for second language/ foreign language teaching. These are motives for using his publications, since he investigates foreign language teaching, PFL and communicative methods.

of everyday life (from the most informal to the formal ones), in oral and written modalities, through the most used text genres and recognizing the wide variation that the Portuguese language presents both in Brazil and in other countries in which it is spoken. For this reason, our courses and tasks/activities are all geared towards interaction, but also taking into account structural aspects, but they are taught within situations of interaction and contextualized.

Finally, technique is characterized as all types of resources, practices and/or activities teacher uses in classroom to achieve the objectives of his classes and planning. It is worth saying that most of the techniques used in our PFL classroom are guided by the communicative approach and by our teacher training (teacher-researcher, action research and active methodologies). Thus, we always try to reconcile these theories in our practice, since in our view they are in conformity with each other. In addition, we practice in our class our teaching training, updating and critical thinking, offering students autonomy to develop themselves at their own pace and according to their objectives in learning Portuguese.

In this way, we emphasize that we see language as interaction, so we adopt the communicative approach and methods in our practice, as we aim to develop in our students grammatical, sociolinguistic, discursive and strategic skills (CELCE-MURCIA, 2007). Furthermore, we consider that teacher-researcher, action research and active methodologies are in accordance with classroom practices, especially the activities and tasks developed for PFL classes using communicative activities (ALMEIDA FILHO; BARBIRATO, 2000), which are classroom practices with real communication data and which have a focus on interaction[12].

In order to illustrate how all this theory reconciliation occurs in our teaching practice, we will present a technique used by us in PFL, which is the activity called 'Brazilian themes', as well as bringing some suggestions in case of need to develop and adapt it.

Brazilian Culture in Practice: debate, research, journalism e correction

Our techniques and classroom activities are guided by the positive examples of action research, active methodologies, Applied Linguistics and foreign language teaching theoretical supports. Although we follow techniques examples from these mentioned theories, we emphasize that we do not simply copy them, but we adapt according to the community, the students' profiles and their objectives when they decide to learn the Portuguese language.

The activity that will be described here, entitled 'Brazilian themes', has influence from cultural portfolios activities and projects, which consist of techniques aimed both at teaching language and culture, as well as to assess how much students are learning about both topics (LEE, 1997; BYON, 2007; SCHULTZ, 2007; SU, 2011; MOUTINHO; ALMEIDA FILHO, 2015). Worthy of note is that the cultural portfolio takes into account student's objectives when learning the target language (SCHULTZ, 2007), instigates processes of reflection and self-evaluation (LEE, 1997; SCHULTZ, 2007) and, as it was already mentioned, presents teaching activities aimed at the language and culture in use (LEE, 1997; BYON, 2007).

Although we do not conduct the development of a cultural portfolio in our PFL courses, as it was not among the objectives we hoped to achieve, our activities present parts of this technique due to the fact that it is in accordance with cultural diplomacy and the communicative approach, which we have already exposed previously. Moutinho and Almeida Filho (2015) relate cultural diplomacy and PFL teaching and quote cultural portfolio examples and activities, especially Su's (2011).

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[12] Almeida Filho and Barbirato (2000) review several meanings for 'task' and emphasize differences between task and activities in classroom. The word 'activity' has a broader meaning "a generic term for actions in classroom which are recognized as organic and also can be found outside classroom in daily life" (ALMEIDA FILHO; BARBIRATO, 2000, p. 29). The word 'task' is a specific one, referring to actions oriented by the teacher for using the foreign language in classroom close to genuine communication.

Following these ideas, the 'Brazilian themes' activity focus on debate, research, interculturality, self-assessment, group work, critical thinking, writing different text genres (dialogue, news, report, among others) and the Portuguese language use in real or simulated situation. This will be detailed later. Before describing our activity, we will make some considerations about our syllabus.

Our courses syllabus are task-based and content-based[13]. The learners are basic or advanced divided in their respective classes[14]. As it was demanded that we thought and elaborated previously our classes objectives, skills, competences and contents, we did it in a relatively flexible way, with a certain space to be adapted for each class and modified according to students' demands. This proved to be advantageous in our practice, because if we need to write a lesson plan, or a new syllabus for intermediate course (level B in CEFR), or Portuguese courses for specific purposes, among other courses, we already have previous syllabus models, which have been tested successfully in previous courses and that serve as a basis for the preparation of future lesson plans and syllabus.

We have chosen task-based for our syllabus, because it focuses on communication (BEGLAR; HUNT, 2002)[15], giving students the learning opportunity to use language in real communicative situations, through tasks that seek to simulate such uses. At times, we also use content-based guidance, since in this orientation, according to Byrnes (2005), language and culture teaching are related in a communicative way, which is the main point of our approach[16].

We do not speak here about the relations between language and culture, nor about intercultural issues in foreign language teaching, for this we refer the reader to Kramsch's (1993), which we consider a substantial reference on the subject, and to brief works, however enlightening, Ferreira's (1998) and Almeida Filho's (2002) are valuable on this topic[17].

The courses in which we have taught had an average of 20 students, distributed by level of knowledge, with the majority of our classes being at advanced level.

We organize the contents of our courses in thematic units that reflect real language use situations, such as: the speaker at home, on the street, shopping, asking for information, interacting with the family, eating, taking care of their health, among others. Thus, the activities are all geared towards communication in the specific situation of the unit and, in the same way, the vocabulary taught belongs to the related semantic field (home, family, food, health).

The number of hours varies between 60 to 80 hours per semester, depending on the institution. On average, each activity step, which we will describe below, corresponds to 4 hours per week, being divided into two days (two hours each class).

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[13] Viana (1997) and Almeida Filho (2007, 2017) discuss some ideas on elaborating foreign language syllabus and lesson plans. Moreover, Barbirato and Silva (2016) and Macedo (2016) dedicate entire publications to this topic.

[14] It is not used here Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) classification for learners because it was not employed at institutions we have teach. But with the objective to make clear, our PFL syllabus are written for basic speakers (A1-A2) and for advanced ones as well (C1-C2). If necessary, we propose some modifications for intermediate speakers (B).

[15] Franco and Almeida Filho (2009) and Almeida Filho (1993) discuss communicative foreign language teaching.

[16] Although we use communicative methods and its related theories, according to what have been discussed here, we state that in case of institutional or students' needs for other PFL courses types – as Portuguese for specific purposes – we can review and change our approach practicing post-method approach and mixing different teaching techniques in order to develop the learners' skills and objectives. Some examples used in this activity demanded an approach with Portuguese grammatical and formal aspects together with the communicative tasks.

[17] References about foreign language teaching and culture during the last decades are wide and related to distinct areas, as Applied Linguistics, Education, Intercultural Studies and even Anthropology. These references also contemplate PFL teaching and continue to expand every year with case studies, experience reports, PFL references books analysis, among other things. Thus, a full debate or a reference list on this topic do not concern the objectives of this text.

The main objective of the activity is to develop oral and written skills, emphasizing the same theme of Brazilian culture for all of them. Hence, students will be guided as they can do different research types, scientific methodology, several text genres and discursive domains[18]. Secondary objectives include: differentiating between formal and informal genres, as well as academic genres from journalistic genres; to know some stages and rudiments of scientific research; to identify and reflect on Brazilian cultural aspects and interculturality. In this way, each step of the activity will try to contemplate the issues involved in the activity and/or make a relationship among them.

The work with text genres in PFL class has been proving effective and is in line with the development of communicative competence. Only one of many examples of this relation is studied by Trouche (2007), in which the author relates PFL teaching to text genres, polyphony and communicative competence. Thus, based on Marcuschi's (2009) definition, which emphasizes the socio-historical aspects of text genres, the practice of communicative teaching in PFL through text genres is important, since it addresses real situations of communication, elements of Brazilian culture, multimodality, among others.

After these previous considerations were made, we started to describe our activity, which was extracted from one of our syllabuses. First, we will organize a brief list of topics in the main stages in order to make it more systematic and objective for the reader, and then we will detail each of the topics presented.

It is noteworthy that we refer to this activity as 'Brazilian themes', but we are aware that this title does not include all stages of it, however we did not want to modify it for the present text in order to remain faithful to our practice.

1st stage (2 hours):

- The teacher starts with a debate about which themes on Brazil, or Brazilian culture, the students already know, and which ones are interested in knowing more;
- After this activity and with the students' answers, the teacher chooses one of the themes (it can be the most voted, the most up to date, the most interesting, with the greatest material available);
- The teacher asks for an activity of research and writing as homework, guiding the searching for sources (references, websites and newspapers);
- The text genre requested must be according to class Portuguese knowledge (summary, review, report) and must contain information on what the student understood about the researched aspect of Brazilian culture[19].

2nd stage (2 hours)
- Each student will make a selection of excerpts from their text for reading in class;
- Next, each student will explain how they did their research and what they learned from it.

3rd stage (2 hours)
- The teacher will instigate a new debate, this time, trying to mention the information brought by the students' research and encouraging them to reflect on myths, stereotypes and prejudices about Brazil;

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[18] The PFL teacher will present only introductory information on these topics, since it is not the course or the activity objectives to develop Linguistics theoretical aspects.

[19] This 1st stage is dedicated for initial orientations only. This may seem a little for two-hour class, but we choose to leave the period free in case of students have many doubts. If there are no questions by the students, we suggest to begin the activity following steps in classroom.

- A self-evaluation will also be conducted to verify whether students have changed their thoughts and opinions, whether they really learned more about the topic they selected and what were the challenges and insecurities in using oral and written Portuguese.

4th stage (2 to 4 hours)
- The teacher will make different moments of correction, being the correction by peers, the collective correction and the teacher correction as well;
- The final product is the rewriting task, which will take into account the different types of corrections, as well as occurring at different times, having both individual and collaborative rewrites.

5th stage (optional/ suggestion) [20]
- The teacher can think about holding an event at the foreign institution about Brazil, consulting and seeking Brazilian governmental authorities support (consulate or embassy) and local ones, the department, the faculty and the student body;
- This event could count on presentations by both Brazilians and foreigners, especially encouraging students to develop their work elaborated in the classroom and presenting them[21].

The first stage of this activity consists in a debate mediated by the teacher about which themes on Brazil, or Brazilian culture[22], the students already know, and which ones are interested in knowing more. In this debate, the teacher, as the mediator, will also raise certain questions for students to reflect and discuss in class, observing aspects of myths, stereotypes and prejudices that exist in relation to Brazil and Brazilian culture. Noteworthy is that this theme will be addressed only in the 3rd stage, but here it follows a direction so that the teacher, in his speech during the 1st stage, can already advance some questions for the students to reflect on for the future classes.

In the second step of this first stage, the teacher, together with the students, will select and negotiate a specific way to choose a theme to be worked on by them on next classes. Here the issue of negotiation between peers and between teacher-student stands out. In addition, the teacher can propose methods of choice to students, such as voting, the topic importance, easiness of research, among others, or ask them if they have any topic in mind to share with the class. It is worth remembering that the teacher must briefly instruct the students on what the next stages of the activity will be like before starting this negotiation process.

It is worth noting that only in these two initial steps, the PFL teacher has already worked on conversation and different oral text genres[23], with emphasis on dialogue, discussion, debate and oral presentation by both parts: the teacher – explanations, conversations – and the students – reading their texts and explaining how they did the research. If necessary, the teacher can make a brief intervention just to comment about

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[20] We are aware about the challenges for organize such event. Thus, we register in our lesson plan and syllabus as a suggestion – it is not mandatory – and it is not reserved any hour in class for it. We affirm this since we could not organize this event ourselves due to lack of support and local limitations.

[21] This orientation is left wide due to the event structure and organization itself which is complex. Thus, we point out only a few characteristics, because specific detail will be limited according to the organizers, financial support, local institution, country/city, among others.

[22] Some common myths, stereotypes and prejudice in our students, which also occurred in other countries, are related to soccer – all Brazilians play soccer and are fans of soccer players as Ronaldinho Gaúcho, Kaká and Neymar –, Brazilian population is homogenous and mainly indigenous or Afro-American, Brazil is a country with a lot of popular festivals similar to Rio Carnival; Brazil is a violent country with constant robbery and armed conflict throughout its territory.

[23] We used here Fairclough's (2003) distinction between activity and genre which is also describe in Travaglia et al. (2013).

these or other theoretical information with the students[24].

Still in the first stage of the activity, with the selected theme, the teacher must instruct in detail which exercises will be worked for the next classes and what the objectives are to be achieved. The teacher will ask for a written text about the chosen Brazilian theme, based on research, both of which – research and textual production – will be done outside class. We emphasize that the chosen text genre must be in accordance with the class Portuguese skills. We usually select any type of report, when students feel more secure in Portuguese writing, or just a summary, when there is still certain difficulties and/or insecurities.

We requested the written text in the form of an article only in our advanced class. We also think about adapting it to oral communication to be presented at the event we planned in the 5th stage, but we were unable to organize such an event in our teaching practice. This article is also an evaluation document for the student, which will be read and corrected by the teacher, who will assign a grade.

In relation to research, we guide students to initially search the internet for the topic and pay more attention to journalism sites and newspapers. If students feel comfortable in reading advanced Portuguese, we also recommend a search in scholar databases, in order to check if there are scientific articles on the selected Brazilian topic. Both the selected topic and the activities organized by the teacher, in addition to the students' Portuguese skills, have as objectives to learn the Portuguese language and develop communicative skills in this language.

At the end of this first stage, the teacher can again insert some theoretical aspects, if they have not been worked on previously, about: genres and text support, when talking about websites and newspapers; discursive domains, with the highlight of journalism and the various genres related to this domain, such as editorial, report, opinion article, chronicle; academic texts, such as summary, experience report, scientific article, among others[25].

In the second stage, the teacher asks the students to read their written text or select a passage (depending on the size), as well as asking them to explain how they did their research and what they learned from it. We highlight here that this step can be done in a conversation circle format, changing the classroom environment or even taking this class in another environment of the institution so that students can feel freer and interact better. Furthermore, the theoretical aspects that the teacher can highlight to students are reading aloud a written text, which differs from oral texts, the resumption of oral genres; and retextualization strategies (MARCUSCHI, 2000), by transforming a written text genre (the students' research) into orality (the presentation/reading).

In this previous mentioned stage, as well as in the third and fourth stages, we provide a space for students to interact, make a self-evaluation, evaluate the production of colleagues and explain how they did their research and written text. We highlight these tasks because they are communicative tasks and are related to specific learning strategies and self-regulated learning. According to Silva, Simão and Sá (2004), self-regulation of learning consists in learners' attitudes and motivations in their own learning process. Thus, we always use some activities of this type in our PFL courses to check mainly how is the degree of motivation of our students both in relation to us, the course and the Portuguese learning.

In the third stage, a new debate will take place, but this time emphasizing myths, stereotypes and prejudices that students might have about Brazil (or Brazilians, or Brazilian culture) and whether the activity 'Brazilian themes' has managed to modify positively the students' opinions. It is possible here, depending on the answers and the class, to carry out a class game 'before and after' style – which can be done on the board,

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[24] According to communicative approach and the specific class profile, theoretical presentation in classroom are reduced occurring only to clarify and in relation to practice. Theoretical, grammatical and terminological content do not apply for our specific PFL learners.

[25] There is Textual Linguistic and related areas terminology used here in Marcuschi (2009).

on posters, post-it notes or a round of conversation – to which each student would point out their thoughts on the topic researched about Brazilian culture before the activity and what he learned or changed after it. The teacher must dispel these myths in relation to soccer, samba/ carnival, violence, among others, discussing Brazil as a mixed race country and with a territory of continental dimensions. Thus, Brazil cannot be thought of as a homogeneous block, but as a multicultural country, with their cities, states and regions, presenting different cultural traits. At this stage, the teacher will also take advantage of the conversation and the casual scenario to ask students to self-evaluate themselves in relation to difficulties and insecurities found in the stages of research, reading and writing in Portuguese.

After students' self-evaluation, which is done orally, but we recommend for the teacher to take notes of what was observed by him and spoken by the students, the fourth stage is dedicated to text correction and reviewing. Following the assumption of different types of reviewing (MIRANDA; FERRAZ, 2014; MAFRA; BARROS, 2017), we decide to carry out the first step of this fourth stage with the peer correction in which a member of the pair will read and make suggestions and changes in the colleague text. During this task all pairs will be supervised by the teacher, who will consult each one to check the learners progress[26]. We make use of collective correction, as well as collaborative rewriting, but we do not consider it as a mandatory step in our 'Brazilian theme', since the teacher will have to take into account the fact that the correction may cause discomfort, embarrassment and increase linguistic insecurity. In order to assess whether the class is prepared or not for that moment, the PFL teacher will evaluate the class scenario and profile, according to his experience and knowledge. If not this task is not possible, then the teacher will skip to start to correct the texts himself.

We use a method for correction that we consider helpful for rewriting. This method consists in underlining in a specific color what we call 'inconsistencies', which are actually deviations from the standard, and we mark with a distinct color (usually red) and with a greater emphasis (circulating) an error in the Portuguese language structure, in that some non-existent element. Noteworthy is that we did not put the correct form, but only expose students to this system of marking and coloring. During the rewriting task the students should try to rethink and recognize why those sentences were underlined. Just as examples, we separate two constructions which we highlighted and returned to the students, both deviations and errors that we analyze as serious:

1. <u>Os brasileiros gosta</u> muito de *braçar*, mas tem gente que não gosta.
'<u>Brazilians like</u> to <u>hug</u>, but there is some people who don't.'

2. A pesquisa mostrou muitas informações e notícias sobre o *Brasil esse.*
'The research has shown a lot of information and news about <u>Brazil this</u>.'

In (1), the underlined part corresponds to the underline we make in students' texts, as it is an agreement deviation. This is very common in different Portuguese varieties and is spoken even by native Portuguese, while *braçar*, which we highlight here in italics, we marked in red for the student, and the same occurred in (2) for *Brasil este*. We became concerned with the latter and consulted the student, as it is a construction little seen even in PFL learners' texts and also because the student is already advanced in Portuguese. The student's

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[26] We work with two options for textual correction and reviewing. We left the students unsupervised or we elaborated a reviewing sheet, also called 'control grid' (MAFRA; BARROS, 2017). We verified that unsupervised students only work for a specific class profile (adult, highly educated and advanced). In other cases, if unsupervised, the learners do not know what to do or review, and even do not know how to start to correct it won text. This reviewing sheet contains objective test questions – yes or no answers – and a brief space for comments, and it also presents questions about text title, theme, language modality, genre structure, reading comprehension and grammatical features.

explanation was significant, as he claimed to have heard in Brazilians' online comic videos, expressions like 'ai, brasilzão, esse daí!' or 'ô Brasil, esse véio de guerra!' and interpreted the existence of the form *Brasil este* 'Brazil this' as compound that was used with comic effect by Brazilians in informal spoken Portuguese.

Upon receiving the texts back, the teacher can perform different moments of rewriting in class: reunite the same pairs so that mutual help occurs, select excerpts to launch on screen (without identifying the student) both examples of good texts (to give positive feedback and reward good things), as well as serious or recurring problems in various texts. If possible, we suggest the collaborative writing occurs in class, which can bring interactions among all learners. The collaborative writing can also be made virtual, through forums, chat rooms or specific sites. After those steps have occurred, it is also necessary for the student to have a moment for himself, performing the individual rewriting as the final product of 'Brazilian theme' activity.

Noteworthy is that more detailed theoretical aspects of the 'Brazilian themes' activity are suitable only for adult and highly educated learners. Our classrooms have present groups of undergraduate and graduate students. In case the teacher finds different classroom profiles, this activity can be adapted in several ways, reducing or eliminating some steps or stages. In addition, another adaptation that it can be made is the focus given to specific elements, namely the text genres and the themes worked on.

Next, we will talk briefly about two adaptations that we have already made for this activity, the first one we called 'Brazil in the media' and the second one 'Brazil and Brazilians'. In 'Brazil in the media', we performed very similar steps, but we focused on activities related to newspaper as a support for text genres, we explained some hypertext and journalism texts, as well as paying attention to the theme of how Brazil is represented in the country's media of each student[27].

The second activity that we develop is called 'Brazil and Brazilians'. This activity is similar, but the debate may have a more serious tone, pointing out certain Brazilian social, political, historical, anthropological peculiarities, among others. We recommend use an informal with students only when talking about what they like most about Brazil, Brazilian culture or its citizens. The emphasis here will be on academic texts, which will require greater skills in Portuguese and higher education from learners. This activity is also related to the optional stage of event organization and the presentation of the written text, which we have not yet presented. There will be a stage to researching and writing, but the PFL teacher must orient or guide the students on scientific research methodology and explain the structure academic texts chosen as well. The correction process will be close to that demonstrated earlier, since the teacher will request, with his assistance, that the students rewrite their texts in a more formal way to formulate a research hypothesis, which should also be verified with the teacher's assistance. The teacher with the hypotheses in hand will support students' research through interviews with the university's faculty members and other students, Brazilians residing in the country (in case of foreign countries), in Brazilian arts or references, depending on what hypotheses were formulated by each student.

It is based on 'Brazilian themes' activity final result – students' texts – or its adaptations, according to the two previous ideas, that we think the organization 'Semana do Brasil' (Brazilian Week) or 'Semana do Brasil em […]' (Brazilian Week in …), whose name of the institution, course or city/ country could be placed in the event title. This 'Brazilian Week' would include the presentation of some PFL students' work, the presence of the Brazilian ambassador or consul, embassy/consulate employees and Brazilian citizens residing in the foreign country who wanted to talk to students, speak about themselves or about Brazil, not to mention

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[27] This occurs when the students are born in different countries. There is also the opposite case, when the PFL teacher resides in a foreign country which demands an adaptation regarding Brazil and how it is pictured in local media. If there is any news about Brazil, we recommend a research on international media, even in other languages – if the students can read other foreign languages – or a debate and interpretation of the motives why there is no news about Brazil by the journalists in the specific country.

that local authorities and other faculty members would also be invited, encouraged to participate and contribute to the event, in order to strengthen the ties between the two nations – Brazil and the foreign one –, other Portuguese-speaking countries and their local cultures.

Finally, after the presentation of our activities, we hope to have made clear the role of the PFL teacher as a cultural diplomat, because during PFL courses and activities inside and outside classroom, the teacher is concerned with teaching the Portuguese language and Brazilian culture in a positive and participatory way, listening to students and instigating them to be interested and to like Brazil. Furthermore, there is also positive aspects of studying Portuguese and the culture of other Portuguese-speaking countries. The PFL teacher also shows interest in the students' opinions, their ideas and cultural traits through debates and interactions in classroom. In addition, the PFL teacher ends up strengthening diplomatic and cultural relations between governments and individuals through the dissemination of students' work and the possibility of organizing an event, always drawing attention to Portuguese and Brazilian culture by doing a good work in PFL teaching.

FINAL REMARKS

The Portuguese language has been gaining space in the world and its teaching, in different modalities (second language, foreign language, heritage language), has grown significantly in the last decades. For this reason, it is worth mentioning the training of the PFL teacher, as well as his role in this process.

The present work is the result of our research and classroom practices, and with it we aim to expand and contribute to PFL teaching. Thus, we argue that the PFL teacher has a notorious role as cultural diplomat in the current international scenario in which public diplomacy and soft power have much more space than impositions and war conflicts, as well as being much healthier and beneficial. In this way, we consider that teacher-researcher and action research theories together with active methodologies and the precise delimitation of approaches, methods and techniques for teaching foreign language are also central for the PFL teacher.

Furthermore, in an attempt to expand our contribution, we brought a task that intertwine our theoretical view, PFL and Brazilian culture teaching, taking into account dialogue, debate, the act of listening to the other (in this case, students' opinions and cultural traits). Also, these attitudes dispel myths, stereotypes and prejudices regarding Brazil. In addition, we provide development options and adaptations of our task for different learners and class profiles.

Finally, we are aware that even with our efforts and with the efforts of other PFL teachers, researchers and people interested in this issue, the path to the Portuguese language expansion in the world, as well as the performance of the PFL teacher, is still long, requiring a clear and active language policy by Brazilian government, at national and international level, and support from different government sectors, in addition to MEC and MRE, which can assist the PFL teacher work and stimulate research, professional appreciation and qualification, among other. The main ministries that could assist in this area are: the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovations (MCTI) and the Ministry of Tourism (MTur), together with several existing secretariats and departments. If the official and public sectors show interest and start to invest, this would arouse the interest of the private sector, which would also invest in the area. This is our hope for the Portuguese language future and PFL teaching.

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