

Review

Phonology and variation: guidelines for teaching

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KAILER, Dircel Aparecida; MAGALHÃES, José; HORA, Dermeval da (org.). *Fonology and variation: guidelines for teaching*. Preface by Luiza Helena Oliveira da Silva. Campinas, SP: Pontes Editores, 2023.

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The book takes a fresh look at the role of the Portuguese language teacher in relation to students in basic education; it links learning to write to a permanent gain in understanding of phonology and the variations projected in writing by speech registers. Presented in 13 chapters, it is a work resulting from research projects developed within the framework of Profletras - the Professional Master's Degree in Letters in the National Network, a program aimed at training teacher researchers - and at pointing out ways to maintain an integrated view of the factors capable of ensuring learning free of prejudice, in particular the standards associated with prestige and exclusion, in addition to the aspects to be considered in the didacticization of academic knowledge. For this reason, it alternates concepts of language with a set of technical knowledge that is essential for teachers to succeed in their pedagogical task.

Signum: Estudos da Linguagem, Londrina, v.27, n.1, p.199-202, april. 2024

Received on: 20/05/2024

Accepted on: 24/03/2024

¹ Translated by: Miguel Luiz Contani.

This way of seeing and considering the challenge of classroom activity makes the content of this book a continuous movement of problematizing and finding solutions and alternatives to involve the student and promote growth and change. In the proposals presented and discussed by the authors, there is an indication and linking of themes, as well as a recommendation of references, preceded by solved exercises, aimed at instrumentalizing teaching in order to consolidate the fluent use of the knowledge acquired. The main message is to demystify established views and formal stances on the pedagogy of Portuguese language teaching, taking Brazilian Portuguese as a deixis.

The preface by Luiza Helena Oliveira da Silva emphasizes the importance of Profletras in the ten years since its creation, and assesses the degree of success of this initiative, taken with the motivation to face challenges such as the complexity of teaching and learning, "the regional asymmetries of access to the university, the displacement of teachers to the units, often crossing states or regions, the obligation to research one's own practice without starting from formulas elaborated beforehand" (Kailer; Magalhães, Hora, 2023, p. 9). In response to the demand to avoid the simplistic solution of teaching isolated words, and the tendency to assign the teacher a mere role of execution, Profletras is committed to disseminating knowledge derived from research into ways of improving teaching.

In the first chapter, Dermeval da Hora offers an engaging account of Profletras' journey, achievements and solid prospects for consolidation. He refers to the theme of Phonology, Variation and Teaching, as a cornerstone, and thus one of the central choices, as a field for the permanent generation of knowledge; he highlights the training of "teachers who work in the teaching of the Portuguese language in Basic Education, especially if we think that many of the master's students work in the early grades". He emphasizes the attention that should be paid to the fact that "the knowledge we have of language courses in Brazil shows us that this subject is not always offered, and when it is, it doesn't meet the interests of what should really happen" (Kailer; Magalhães; Hora, 2023, p. 27).

Another important link with the results of the studies gathered here is the instrumentalization of the proposal to welcome students, in order to integrate them in the acquisition of skills to deal with the diversification of registers, and to get used to making conversions, in order to learn to express sonorities in the writing they are learning. The chapters as a whole promote contact with a living experience, described and evaluated, with results stemming from a problematization, defined as part of scientific research. It becomes clear that the challenge of making teachers aware of the fact that knowledge of phonetics is inseparable and requires detailed and in-depth study.

The notion that simply alphabetizing by the sounds of each letter is enough, without thinking about any other implications between listening, speaking and "converting" all this sound into writing, is an illusion. It is undeniable that this awareness has always existed, but it is worth pointing out that the lack of success can often be linked to an insufficient understanding of the phonetic field. The students come with a record, which they have solidly introjected, and their ability to articulate sounds will be faithfully reflected in their writing. What will sometimes be pointed out as an error - for example, the exchange of an /l/ for /u/, or /e/ for /i/ - is a divergence that tends to be resolved by the explanation; the same can be said about the composition of syllables, or so-called deletions, as can be seen in *chamar/chamá; fazer/fazê*; or in the tendency to write the third person of verbs: *ele pede/ele pedi (pédi); ele disse/ele dissi*.

The message reiterated is to reinforce the conviction of never devaluing the students' heritage, and to encourage them to simply discern, and then start working on their acquisition of writing. This will ensure that they don't feel belittled by themselves, and that they value the opportunity to expand their repertoire with the addition of a standard that will be required of them at a certain stage of their growth and entry into professional life.

The initial topics are phonetics and phonology, the treatment of vowel segments, variation and syllable teaching. The focus continues with diphthongs and monophthongization; support for teachers in the treatment of fricatives and written correlates is added, and the question of rhotics is

brought up in association with the teaching of Brazilian Portuguese. Difficulties in writing the lateral consonant are compounded by the treatment of nasalization and stress, topics complemented by unconventional spellings and the use of the hyphen.

The approaches become convergent and encourage a profile of researching in order to teach. Special treatment is given to pointing out errors and corrections: what is considered incorrect for one register is perfectly correct for another; it is therefore not a question of annulling registers, but of ensuring a new acquisition. To achieve this, teachers need to go through a technical exercise themselves, with examples of the various attempts and adjustments, and at the same time have the support of existing references. In this sense, the reading of each chapter is also motivation to seek supervision of their actions, with the important effect undoubtedly being the want to and the know how to find the best approach to lead the students to act in a way they are not, as yet, sufficiently accustomed.

The notion of incorrectness is altered by the attitude of indicating more possibilities for incorporating the usage considered correct, which is not achieved on the first attempt. Errors pointed out with a mere scratch on the writing sheet add much less if there is no stimulus to study the language. What ends up happening is the opposite: the frustration of being faced with something unattainable, always accompanied by a feeling of incapacity, which is a proven cause of school dropout and failure; plus the disadvantageous assessment that there hasn't been enough commitment, a lack of interest usually pointed out as something typical of age, or a lack of commitment to school.

The fascinating field of phonetics associated with writing is contextualized in the second and third chapters, with solutions pointed out for the possible difficulties that students may encounter in Portuguese language classes regarding spelling “deviations” from the standard norm. The analysis explains, evaluates alternatives and points out readings. Teaching practices are focused on highlighting the most recurrent processes. The advances made by Profletras' research into Portuguese language teaching are also highlighted.

The phonological issue in the vowel system of Brazilian Portuguese is dealt with in chapter 4, with a warning about the long-term damage caused by merely intuitive pedagogical work, without appropriating knowledge of the phonic structure of the language. The diphthong is highlighted in chapter 5, with particular emphasis on the synchronic perspective with projection in oral and written use. The phonological process is taken up again to explain monophthongization, a topic dealt with in chapter 6, and emphasized as a very frequent process in Brazilian Portuguese. Emphasis is also placed on encouraging students to deal with the effects of speech interference on writing; to this end, the variation of diphthongs between speech and writing is dealt with in detail.

The variations found in different dialects are covered in Chapter 7, with a focus on fricatives and their importance in building linguistic awareness to support writing. One recommendation is for the teacher to take on the permanent task of perceiving and understanding the constitutive variations of the different dialects.

The term rhotic is defined in relation to phonemes and some allophones of Brazilian Portuguese varieties. This discussion is accompanied by examples in chapter 8, with a curious emphasis on the correlation between teaching and learning, taking due care with the esteem and prestige of certain variants, with the observation of considering the degree of formality of the context, the discursive genre and the interlocutor.

The treatment of the syllable is the subject of chapter 9, highlighting the variations imposed by speech, such as the writing of the lateral <l> due to vocalization, retroflexion or deletion of this segment, with the syllabic coda being a fundamental understanding. The phonetic fluctuations of nasalization, which are reflected in writing, are dealt with in Chapter 10, with a detailed, in-depth and enriching discussion of the challenges of the written register. The syllabic coda is also a central element here; knowing how it manifests itself allows us to expand teaching alternatives. The always interesting approach to syllabic structure appears in chapter 11, with emphasis on divergent forms

and the scale of complexity. An observation is made about the sound component as a presence in the grammar of a natural language, alongside the morphological, syntactic and semantic elements.

The correlations between speech and writing, in the use of diacritics in Brazilian Portuguese, is highlighted in chapter 12, dealing with accentuation, with an emphasis on the ability to demarcate the differences between the two. A suggestion is made for students to reflect on the linguistic system they use when transposing speech into writing. In the reflection in chapter 13, entitled "All together or all apart? unconventional spellings of words", phonological words and morphological words are seen in terms of their non-coincidence, in order to assess the boundaries between the word and its written record.

Reading the book, in all the topics it covers and details, provides solid elements for thinking about everyday registers. Several comparisons are possible: the tendency to pronounce *familia* as "*famia*" and work as "*trabaio*" is a process that has a whole (technical) explanation in phonological terms. In French, /e/ has several pronunciations, but in each case the writing is different, with the particularity that it is a phonetic solution and not a tonic one. Spellings such as /e/, /è/, /é/ and their sound equivalents, open and closed, are also forms of spelling. In Portuguese, students only have the five vowels to express the vowel sounds they have learned to make. The conviction that what is "wrong" in one system is "perfectly correct" in another must be permanent; phonetics and variation are indispensable knowledge.

Teachers will begin to play an active role when they bring to the profile of their work the view that the teaching they promote is the knowledge of language in its sonorization. In reality, what comes to light is the complexity of the writing and textual production process when, in the Portuguese language, in its various forms of expression, sounds change and can be open or closed, but spelled with the same letter. In this case, teaching becomes an experiential activity, not just one of transmission. This is Profletras' contribution to pedagogical practices, which in turn build teacher protagonism in processes specifically aimed at basic education.