ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Writing for life: materials might make a difference

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at identifying in two English textbooks, High Up (2013) and Freeway (2010), suggested by the Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD), which activities have greater potential to promote writing abilities for communication. To achieve such objective, both books were analyzed and compared taking into consideration the conceptions of language, text genres, teaching sequence, and writing as a process in English as an additional language. The conclusion of this examination shows that there is a distance between the textbooks authors' intention of dealing with written language, in an interactionist perspective, and the teaching material. Throughout the article, some suggestions were put forward in order to improve the sequences by adjusting them to the theoretical views of the books. The findings reveal that one of the books explored activities that consider aspects of genre, audience, text purpose, and writing as a process.

KEYWORDS: The writing process; text genres; teaching sequence; interaction; English as an additional language.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of literacy theories, reading and writing are seen as central constitutive practices of a broad set of social practices. More and more, theorists and educators are concerned with the use of language resources to fulfill social and cultural functions in varied contexts of communication with a plethora of different demands (Bazerman & Prior, 2007). Writing is, then, a matter of producing texts to interact socially in personal and professional settings to realize a wide range of purposes. To do so, interactants need to develop not only technical knowledge about language forms/grammar, but also discourse competence.

As written practices are essentially interactive, time and space play an important role for the constitution of meaning. In fact, because of the permanence of writing and the physical distance between writer and reader, several different interactions may occur, as well as several possibilities of making meaning, particularly nowadays with knowledge specialization and globalization contexts (2007).

From this perspective, writing is an extremely complex competence which needs to be learned (and taught) in the first language speakers acquire, let alone in an additional language. That is why it is no easy task for teachers to understand the process and to offer learners adequate input and guidance to allow them to produce their own meaningful pieces of writing.

What is required of teachers nowadays in this respect? Knowledge, both practical and theoretical, about written texts production aimed at social interaction in the everyday life. What is implied here is that writing should not be viewed as a mere skill, although skill development is a necessary requirement for written text production. Besides, teachers need to be able to select and produce their own effective materials, in a critical line, considering the assumptions on language, learning and teaching, which constitute the basis of the teaching material. Our own experience as educators has shown that the more teachers are aware of the principles that explicitly or implicitly are part of the teaching material, the better they will be able to make a profitable use of it and, if necessary, to adapt it to students' specific needs.

Thus, the aim of this article is to, via materials examination, contribute with pedagogical information on the mediational means for teaching writing for communication, towards autonomy of both teacher and learner. Relying on theoretical assumptions consistent with functional/discourse approaches, within the framework of social interactionism, a comparative study of two different teaching materials intended at the teaching of writing to secondary students in Brazilian public schools is carried out, followed by suggestions, whenever appropriate, on how to add emphasis to meaningful interaction in the teaching approach to writing as a social practice.

2. BASES OF THE STUDY

In the attempt to provide students with opportunities to develop their discourse competence, teachers often make use of a diversity of materials: books, pictures, charts, *realia* and technological aids (computers, projectors, cell phones, tablets, 3D printers, etc). However, the most accessible and

common type of material support for teaching English in the Brazilian public educational context still is the textbook.

Textbooks can be classified in a number of ways, depending on the criteria adopted. According to the focus on language as structure/form or discourse/function, we can separate them into two broad groups. Indeed, it becomes evident in a preliminary analysis that some textbooks tend to contain grammatical and other linguistic explanations as well as exercises aiming at language mastery (often addressed as "traditional books" or "structuralist" in the literature), while the most updated textbooks are communicatively-oriented and emphasize tasks situated in a meaningful context aiming at interaction (usually referred to as "communicative", "interactionist" or even "social/cultural").

The way these materials are used in class may also vary a great deal. Some teachers rely on the textbook as the basis for the course they are teaching and consider it a manual to be strictly followed, others have a 'do-it-yourself' approach, as they choose to establish their own program and use a selection of materials when necessary, and the last part of professionals opt for compromising by using the textbook selectively, not always in sequence, and with the aid of complementary materials (Ur, 2012; Harmer, 2007).

Even though external aspects such as the resources available and the policy of the school the teacher works for may influence his or her choice for whether or not to have a textbook as the basis for a course, the pedagogical advantages and disadvantages of this type of material should be considered.

Authors like Ur (2012) and Harmer (2007), experienced teacher educators, point out the main pedagogical benefits of using a textbook:

- Good textbooks are carefully prepared to provide clear framework and syllabus, and consequently, a sense of structure and progress;
- Since they have ready-made texts and tasks, which are likely to be adequate to the students' level, textbooks may save time for the teachers as well as offer guidance and support, especially for inexperienced or unconfident professionals.
- Textbooks contribute to the students' perception of progress as units are completed and to autonomy as they can use the textbook to review and monitor their development.

In fact, more often than not, textbooks offer a valuable support for teaching. On the other hand, teachers' empirical experience, corroborated by the same authors, point out some of the main restrictions for using a textbook. While students may find that their individual needs, for instance, level of ability and proficiency, learning characteristics and interests are not being met, teachers may find themselves as a "mediator of the textbook", and, as result, feel discouraged from using their own initiative and creativity.

Regardless of choosing or not to base a course on a textbook, some well known writers on language teaching (Brown, 2007; Ur, 2012) seem to agree on the fact that the teachers ought to know how to recognize appropriate materials. To do so, the authors suggest some criteria that teachers might have in mind when choosing a textbook for a course or evaluate the one they are currently using:

1) Is the approach of the textbook (theories of learning and language) suitable to the students (age, native language and culture, purpose for learning English)?
2) Is the layout and the appearance (the book as a whole and single pages) clear and adequate?
3) Is the content clearly organized, graded and appropriate to the level it aims at?
4) Is there a variety of texts and tasks, appropriate for different learner levels, learning styles and interests?
5) Is there clarity of directions, both for the teacher (teacher's guide) and the student (activities), who can be encouraged to become independent?
6) Does the material provide plenty of opportunities for practicing and reviewing vocabulary?

Indeed, those criteria are extremely useful and valid for material selection and, in general terms, coincide with the ones proposed for the present investigation, the focus of which is mainly on *language in use* and the pedagogical aspects associated with it. More on the criteria adopted for the analysis of writing activities and tasks in two different textbooks within the present scope can be found in section 3 of this paper, concerned with the methodology of the study.

2.1 Concepts of language

Broadly speaking, language can be looked at from two different, but not opposing, perspectives: (a) as a code or as a system comprised by structures that allow a *particular speaker* the correct construction of sentences and (b) as an activity carried out by the interactants, i. e., a language system put into practice by *two or more people* to convey meaning in a given context. While the first perspective, a formal one, takes speakers as part of an abstract human kind, the second takes into account situated discourse as practiced by real here-and-now speakers, stressing the relationships existing between language and life (Bakhtin, 2003) by viewing language "as measure of our lives" (Morrison *apud* Duranti, 2000, p. 27). In other words, the focus is on language as a social practice historically determined. In fact, language realizes itself in the interaction between individuals (Bernárdez, 2004). And, conversely, life enters language by means of verbal interactions (Bakhtin, 2003). In accordance with the proposed objectives, in this article we assume the second perspective, for it takes into account communication realized through language.

The distinction between formalist theories and those which focus on situated discourse production has been stressed by a large number of researchers, educators, and writers who consider meaning and the social functions of language in use to have primacy over linguistic forms (for instance, Bakhtin, 2003; Antunes, 2009a; Marcuschi, 2008; Bronckart, 2003; Bernárdez, 2004) in the sense that linguistic resources are used to convey meaning in social contexts. Nevertheless, when it comes to language teaching and teaching materials, the focus still remains, to a great extent, exclusively on form.

Obviously, these two different broad perspectives, the first taking the language system in its immanence and the second viewing language as

a social activity, underlie different conceptions and methods for language teaching, here included the teaching of writing which is the primary concern of this article.

2.2. The teaching of writing

If language is seen as a social activity, there is not such a thing as "writing on its own sake", as posed by traditional approaches, either in the teaching of Portuguese or in the teaching of English as an additional language. The writing of decontextualized sentences, with no clear purpose, does not happen in authentic situations, with the exception of specific pedagogical activities created to practice a particular linguistic topic regarding writing. (Antunes, 2009b).

From a (social) interactionist point of view, the writing process initiates because someone thinks about something to be expressed to somebody else to achieve, via interaction, some specific purpose. Taking this into account, the writer will immediately have to keep in mind some information about the task: text purpose, general subject, appropriate genre to achieve the purpose, who will probably read the text, the register to be used and practical conditions for production (time, presentation, and format) (Antunes, 2009b; Garcez, 2004).

When writing, the person with whom the writer interacts is not present at the moment the text is produced, however, their existence should be acknowledged. Such verbal interaction will occur in a delayed manner, as these people will not occupy the same time or the same space. Besides that, there will be a gap in time between text production and the reading action. (Antunes, 2009b).

Writing changes in format according to the purpose it will perform within a given context, and, consequently, in terms of a large variety of genres it might fit into. According to Bakhtin (2003), because genres are relatively stable, although historical and cultural in essence, they have a specific compositional construction, which will allow its recognition and production by speakers of the same community whenever necessary. "Discourse genres organize our speech almost in the same way grammar forms (syntax) do", affirms the author (2003, p. 283) (our translation)[1] He goes on to explain that "if the genres did not exist or if we had to create them for the first time in the discourse process or if they were constructed freely, communication would be almost impossible" (2003, p. 283) (our translation).[2]

Actually, we do not speak or write in the same way in all situations; the oral and written genres in which our texts are inscribed may have a higher or lower level of planning, register choices or spontaneity degrees, which is noticeable, for instance, in the difference between a lecture, in an academic environment, and a discussion with friends; or between a message left in a social network and a professional email. Thus, it seems to be desirable

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[1] Versão de: "Os gêneros do discurso organizam nosso discurso da mesma forma que o organizam as formas gramaticais (sintáticas)."

[2] Versão de: "Se os gêneros do discurso não existissem e nós não os dominássemos, se tivéssemos de criá-los pela primeira vez no processo do discurso, de construir livremente e pela primeira vez cada enunciado, a comunicação discursiva seria quase impossível."

in a teaching situation to give students opportunities to develop discourse competence in writing as an interactive activity within the framework of text genres, for "writing without knowing to whom, from the beginning, is a hard, painful and, finally, inefficient task […]" (Antunes, 2009b, p. 46) (our version). In a genre approach towards the practice of writing, the action of writing a text is not enough; the text must have a function and also be put into circulation. According to Dolz, Noverraz and Schnewly (2004), in order to develop oral and written capacities in different situations of communication students need to be exposed to specific sequences to practice writing, which will provide precise production contexts, as well as multiple and varied activities and exercises aiming at helping students to appropriate the characteristics of the genre so that they become able to produce an adequate piece of language within a meaningful context.

In order to handle social, cultural and linguistic variables in pedagogical situations, the authors then propose the use of *teaching sequences*, which they describe as *an approach to work with oral and written genres in classroom in a systematic and organized manner* (Dolz, Noverraz, Schnewly, 2004, p. 97). According to this proposal, sequences are composed of distinct moments with different objectives, which are:

1. *Introduction to the situation* – here the task is explained in detail (a communication problem) and students will get prepared to the initial production by giving answers to questions such as "Who is the production aimed at?", "Which format will the production have (audio/video record, leaflet, letter to be sent...)?", "Who will participate and how (everyone, individually, pairs...)?", "Which genre will be used?";

2. *Initial production*: in this stage students are asked to produce a text that will fit the given situation. Even though they might not respect the characteristics of the genre, this activity will provide the teacher with the chance to evaluate the capacities acquired and adjust the following activities and exercises (modules) to the group's possibilities and difficulties;

3. *Modules:* stages in which students look for information on the topic and learn about characteristics of the required genre, and the language resources (grammar and vocabulary, cohesion) to realize the set communicative purpose (function, coherence). A sequence can have as many modules as necessary to provide students with opportunities to overcome the problems shown in the initial production;

4. *Final production:* a stage during which students will write the final version of the specific genre, putting into practice the knowledge acquired and culminating with the socialization of the product (a poster session, a blog, an oral presentation, a fair, a booklet, a magazine, a video, etc.). Next, teacher and students will assess the whole process.

The value of the *teaching sequence* as a (social)interactionist approach to language teaching relies on dealing with language in use. It also considers writing as a process, not as a single final product, focusing on the communicative function it has. A perspective which also stresses the series of operations involved in text production is the one known as *stages of the writing process*. From a pedagogical point of view, the distinct moments of the *writing process* can be identified and integrated into a *teaching sequence*.

The idea of dividing the writing process into stages is nowadays widely spread among practitioners, showing effective results in the classroom. Generally labeled as *rehearsing, drafting/composing* and *editing* (Richards, Platt, J., & Platt, H., 1992), the three stages of the writing process are also known in the educational area, respectively, as *prewriting, writing* and *rewriting*. Nevertheless, in the composing process, these stages do not occur in a fixed sequence, but are likely to happen throughout the whole process according to the authorship needs, as pointed out by educators like Richards, Platt, J. and Platt, H. (1992), Garcez (2004), and Antunes (2009b).

The stage known as *prewriting* includes activities that will help the writer find a way to develop the task, that is, how to gather information and organize the ideas in a sort of plan or scheme, taking into account the audience the text is intended to. Procedures such as brainstorming may be carried out at this stage as well as other introductory activities.

The following stage is *writing*, that is, executing the task the writer was assigned (or, ideally, has chosen to do for communication purposes) and putting on paper (or on screen) what was planned. At this moment, lexis, syntax and semantics selection will take place and the features of the genre will have to be acknowledged. Furthermore, it is important to notice that teaching writing to learners of English as an additional language has a particular implication: more than in their mother tongue, students need to be provided with key vocabulary, as this can be an obstacle when writing. Although students are given guidance on the genre and the content, lack of vocabulary and register familiarity can make them feel insecure or even unable to perform the task. Thus, together with sentence and text aspects, a strong concern with vocabulary development is essential during the whole process.

The third stage, *rewriting*, corresponds to the revision or editing of the written text. At this point, feedback will be given, either by the teacher or by the classmates, in order to help students to evaluate and improve their own texts. This will happen so as to check whether the purpose of the text was fulfilled and the ideas were developed coherently, clearly and connectedly by using syntax, semantics, spelling, punctuation and paragraph division rules. (Soares, 2009; Antunes, 2009b). In other words, it corresponds to the action of assessing how adequate language resources are to realize the communicative purpose of the text which is being produced.

At this point, the teacher mediation in terms of feedback to the student should be considered. If authorship, and consequently, autonomy, is to be developed, the teacher's role is to provide students with information or questions regarding the inadequacies rather than simply returning the student's text with all the correction done for him/her only to copy. Different from fair copying, editing presupposes the activation of several high level competences such as analysis, comparison, insertion, evaluation, and decision-making at text/discourse level.

In order to further describe the mediational process, a definition of feedback is in line. Feedback is the action of a mediator, teacher or classmate, to assist the student/writer in identifying and correcting inadequacies in the text by themselves. The intervention of these different mediators is related to two types of feedback which are well described by Soares (2009) as teacher-given and classmate-given.

In *teacher-given feedback*, the teacher is the mediator in charge of identifying aspects to be improved in the student's text so that he/she can carry out his/her own editing. To be effective, this type of feedback should comprise enough elements to guide the student such as identification and classification of inadequacies, questions and/or suggestions on how to deal with them. Feedback can also be given to the whole class when common needs are detected. For example, a student's text can be shown to be analyzed by the whole group, so that students can suggest changes. Another format can be the analysis of fragments of different texts produced by the students. After that, students will be guided to go back to their own texts and rewrite them, taking into consideration the discussion carried out by the class.

Classmate-given feedback is acknowledged as a collaborative intervention and may happen in different ways. If in pairs, the students will exchange productions and comment on each other's work; later, each student will carry out his/her own rewriting. Comments may be either oral or written, however, the students should be provided with guidelines for analyzing the classmate's text. The pairs can be chosen by the students, so that they feel comfortable to intervene and make comments regarding the classmate's text, or by the teacher, who can pair more proficient students together with students who need greater improvement. Within a teaching sequence, feedback should happen in varied ways, depending on the genre to be explored, whether students wrote the text individually or in group and which objective the teacher has for the activity.

Although the framework comprised by a teaching sequence is a valuable tool to organize a learning situation, there are further issues which demand teachers' attention. One of them has to do with the historical, cultural, and technological development contemporary societies have been experimenting with. In the educational field, in recent years, the advent of new technologies for rapid written communication has meant that more time has been devoted to this ability in language classes (Ur, 2012), as people from different parts of the world use written English to interact, commonly by means of the internet. In fact, as Prensky (2012a, p. 3), rightly points out, "the locus of knowledge has, in the 21st century, moved to a great extent from the teacher to the Internet".

Nowadays, the great majority of our students are digital natives, (Prensky, 2009) already born within a digital technological context, intuitively prone to operate with digital devices. Research has shown that digital natives have some cognitive characteristics which allow them to do different tasks simultaneously, accounting for the use of different cognitive skills. These cognitive changes which are brought about by the use of digital technology include enhancements in memory, and in the capacity to analyze, make decisions, hypothesize, and judge, which are associated with the use of digital devices such as computers, cell phones, online data bases, online collaboration tools, three dimensional virtual simulations, among others. (Prensky, 2012b). But the author warns educators (and that is our concern as well) that technological devices by themselves are not tools for education; they acquire educational value when students use these devices to do powerful tasks, i. e. those that offer them opportunities to innovate, to contribute new ideas or pieces of knowledge in creative new ways.

Bearing some of these aspects in mind, we come to the conclusion that education should include digital resources in tasks as well as in teaching and learning materials at schools. In our view, textbooks as mediational means are a suitable instance to propose projects which could benefit from the adequate and meaningful use of technology. The tool of digital technology to support education can be extremely helpful when it comes to meet the needs of digital native students to face the rapid changes and uncertainties which are already known to the scientific community as features of the 21st century. In agreement with specialists like Prensky (2009; 2012) and Ur (2012), we assume the use of new technologies to be an essential factor of social and intellectual inclusion and, as such, an educational goal to be reached.

3. HOW THE STUDY WAS DEVELOPED

For the purpose of this paper, the English language is taken as an additional language (EAL) instead of a foreign language (EFL), in order to give the other language and its culture a treatment of respect in an unprejudiced view. English as a foreign language (EFL) is a widely known expression which applies to the study and use of English by non-native English speakers who live in countries where English is not the local language (Nordquist, 2015). On the other hand, English as an additional language (EAL), originally proposed by Levine (Meek, 1996 *apud* Leung, 2005), is a term which has been used at least in two senses: with reference to multilingual learners, i. e., people who are learning English as their second, third, and etc language. In this sense, it aims at immigrants or refugees from different ethnic background other than that of the native English speaking country. The second sense is associated with the idea of inclusion in the educational system of the host country by means of offering immigrants equal conditions when compared to native English-speaking students (Leung, 2005).

The EAL perspective is based on humanistic pedagogic principles which focus on students' learning needs, besides favoring social interaction between students and between students and teachers. EAL has been a curriculum policy in the UK since the 1980s (Leung, 2005). Schlatter and Garcez (2012) advocate the use of EAL within the Brazilian context, once it is based on inclusive and non-discriminatory principles about teaching children from various social and linguistic backgrounds, giving place to the development of citizenship.

Apart from this concern with respect for diversity, the body of knowledge produced in the EFL area cannot be underestimated, for there have been valuable theoretical and pedagogical contributions for language teaching that can, at any moment, be adapted to comprise a meaningful context of communication. Anyway, writing is certainly a basic skill, such as speaking, listening and reading, and, for this reason, should be taught and inserted in a social practice framework.

In order to achieve the main goal of this paper, which is to contribute with pedagogical information on the mediational means for teaching writing (not as a mere skill, but as a contextualized interactive practice), towards autonomy of both teacher and learner, two different coursebooks designed for the second grade of secondary education were examined, considering the theoretical assumptions put forth in the first part of this paper.

The study is descriptive and qualitative in nature, for what is at play is the potential teaching materials might have to facilitate the development of interactive writing abilities. It is important to highlight that the concern is pedagogical and not judgmental in any sense. In order to guide the analysis of the activities displayed in the chosen textbooks, we join Brown (2007) and Ur (2012) by asking whether the approach of the textbook (mainly with reference to the theoretical foundation) is suitable to the purpose of learning English aiming at communication.

The first coursebook examined is High up 2, by Reinildes Dias, Leina Jucá and Raquel Faria, edited by Macmillan, (from now on, Book One) and the second one is Freeway, a collective book designed, developed and edited by Richmond Editors (from now on, Book Two). Both books were recommended by Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD). As largely known by now, PNLD is a program created by the Brazilian Education Ministry (MEC) to assess textbooks and publish a guide containing reviews about them, aiming at helping school teachers to choose the best option to be used in their classes.

Both textbooks were analyzed taking into account the following criteria:

- text production as an interactive activity involving a context of communication, an audience, a communicative purpose, and a recognizable text format (genre) (Bronckart, 2003; Marcuschi, 2008; Antunes, 2009a; Antunes 2009b);
- development of writing in a progression, that is, from an easier activity to a more complex one, within the framework of a teaching sequence (Dolz, Noverraz, & Schnewly, 2004);
- exploration of language structures (grammar and vocabulary) to realize the discourse functions throughout the whole writing process;
- clear and organized instructions and a variety of activities, relying on different mediational means.

Along with the material examination, suggestions were made so as to improve some textbook activities that did not seem to fit the framework of the genre theory and communication-oriented approach (as established as the theoretical foundation in both textbooks), within a teaching sequence. Although there are other well-known models for working with writing, empirical experience has shown that a focus on language aspects only is not enough to develop discourse competence in writing, as many people, to a great extent, still consider it hard to produce written texts, what constitutes an obstacle, either professionally or academically.

4. MATERIALS ANALYSIS

4.1. Book One

According to the authors, the main purpose of the whole *High up* collection is to develop students' literacy so that they can use the English language in social interactions, either orally or in writing, and in printed and digital texts. The theoretical and methodological framework chosen to achieve that is based on the social and cultural aspects of learning, discursive notion of language, and collaborative approach (Dias, Jucá, & Faria, 2013).

The book is composed of eight units, organized per sections that have different purposes, regarding abilities and competences. They deal with

receptive genres (genres students will read or listen to) as well as productive genres (genres students will practice, either by writing or by speaking); besides that, topics of language (vocabulary and grammar) are provided in each unit. These aspects are related both to the theme of the unit and the enabling abilities that allow interaction as a final purpose. Oral genres are meant to be produced in units 1, 3, 5 and 7, in a section called *Have your say*; whereas written genres are meant to be produced in units 2, 4, 6 and 8, in a section entitled *Put It In Writing*. As that is the only section in the book that deliberately works with the practice of writing, the purpose of this paper, it will be the focus of the following analysis.

It is important to mention that Book One authors state that section *Put It In Writing* aims at developing the students' capacity to produce coherent and cohesive texts, which are regarded as a social practice of interlocution in the English language. They also argue that the purpose of the text to be created, to whom it is directed and the discourse structure of text organization are key factors to the objective of the section. The concept of text improvement, which would take into account debates, reflections, successive drafts and rewritings until the final version, is also expressed by the authors as a topic of concern throughout the section. What is implied here is that the frame of reference the authors would take for developing writing activities involves the interactionist characteristic of writing, the idea of writing as a process and the genre approach. This view is quite close to the teaching sequence proposed by Dolz, Noverraz and Schnewly (2004), differing only with respect to the initial written production.

Such perspective can be noticed in the textbook as, in general pedagogical terms, the proposed writing activities include a contextualization, development stages and then text production, which will include a context of communication, an audience and a purpose; and require an appropriate genre for the situation. Besides, the genres are studied in a progression, from an easier to a more complex one, which endorses the concern with writing as a process.

Sets of integrated activities guide students towards writing a *testimonial* in Unit 2, a *short rap* in Unit 4, a *graph* in Unit 6 and, finally, a *letter to the editor* in Unit 8. The instructions for those activities are clear and organized and the teacher's guide contributes to the conduction of each sequence. Language structures and vocabulary are also explored in the previous sections beforehand the writing itself, which provides the students with more resources to carry out the tasks.

Unit 2: testimonial

In unit 2, before section *Put It In Writing*, the students are supposed to listen to a *testimonial* on being a digital learner. At this moment, they are presented with some characteristics of the genre *testimonial*. After the listening activity, they will read the description for the genre: "A testimonial offers details and a personal opinion of a particular event or situation experienced by the writer" (Dias, Jucá, & Faria, 2013, p. 38). Subsequently, in section *Put It In Writing*, they are requested to write a testimonial. Before doing the task, they are presented a written testimonial, accompanied by an activity that explores the features of the genre.

Such set of activities supports the conception of the book of practicing writing abilities from the genre perspective, as it is consistent with the format of a genre, in this case, a testimonial. The sequence is also developed involving a purpose, "state your position on the advantages of being a digital English learner" (Dias, Jucá, & Faria, 2013, p. 39); and an audience, "your English teacher, classmates, and other school students" (Dias, Jucá, & Faria, 2013, p. 39). The teacher's guide suggests that the audience can be broadened to the whole school, by displaying the testimonials on the school walls or publishing them on the group blog.

The stages of the writing process are also contemplated as activities regarding prewriting, writing and rewriting are proposed, even if with some gaps that may require further work. At first, the students have to plan their writing and brainstorm their ideas. However, it is not clear how they should do it, whether as a whole class or in pairs, just discussing or writing a plan. Secondly, the students are asked to write their testimonial by using a checklist to revise it, that is, writing and revising happen at the same time, which may be a complex task. The checklist has only three items, for which students have to tick yes or no (Dias, Jucá, & Faria, 2013, p. 39):

1. It's written according to the characteristics of the genre.
2. It meets my writing objectives.
3. The language is appropriate to my audience.[3]

A suggestion would be to include more specific items on the checklist, such as to point out whether the testimonial includes an opinion for or against a particular topic or whether it is written in an informal way, using contractions and colloquial words. This checklist could be used for the students to exchange their texts with their classmates and give each other feedback. After that, they could rewrite their texts and, finally, publish them.

Unit 4: Short rap

In section *Put It In Writing* of unit 4, the students are invited to write a *short rap*. As in the previous writing sequence, abilities are developed within the genre perspective, as it is consistent to the format of a genre, a *rap*. The purpose of the genre, which is to express thoughts and feelings through music, is made explicit and there is an intended audience: classmates, teacher and other students. The teacher's guide suggests the songs could be presented in a festival for the whole school.

Although there is not enough exposure to the genre in the textbook, as students will only have contact with a single short extract of a rap, some characteristics are presented, and, in the teacher's guide, teachers are oriented to ask students to bring examples of raps and discuss the discourse and the linguistic elements which may be present in the text.

Feedback and rewriting, parts of the concepts of the teaching sequence and writing as a process, are not mentioned in the section, as the book only brings the same items as in unit 2 to be ticked. It is implied that the task is supposed to be carried out individually; however, as a suggestion, it could be carried out in pairs or even in groups, as social psychology principles (Vigotski, 2007) and empirical experience allow us to say that pair work

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[3] The same checklist will appear in the next three writing sequences of the book.

would enable students to share their ideas, learn with each other and, consequently, do a more creative piece of writing. If the task was to be carried out in this manner, a helpful form of feedback could be given by the teacher in various ways: by indicating possible inadequacies, by naming them, by giving examples or by indicating the type of inadequacies (content, spelling, grammar, vocabulary, register) as well as resources they could use to clarify specific doubts.

Unit 6: Genre graph

The genre explored in unit 6 is a *graph*. Actually, as the genre comprises images together with text, it would be better defined as an *infographic*.

The students are exposed to an example of an *infographic* and, as it happened in the previous unit, in the teacher's guide, the teachers are asked to bring different examples of the genre. There are also suggestions of websites where it is possible to visualize *infographics* and use tools to create them. And, once more, the communicative situation is expressed: students have to write an *infographic* to show their eating habits to the school community.

The three stages of writing (prewriting, writing and rewriting) seem to happen all at the same time; students go directly to the execution of the task by using the checklist to revise the text. For this matter, although theorists (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992; Garcez, 2004 and Antunes, 2009b) highlight that the stages do not need to occur in a fixed sequence, but are likely to happen throughout the whole process according to the authorship needs, for pedagogical reasons, some activities involving brainstorming, debating and researching on the topic (prewriting) and a careful revision after the first draft would be beneficial in terms of the production of an adequate piece of writing, because it helps students to organize ideas, make decisions and try to create something that is meaningful to their audience.

Since there is no reference to feedback or rewriting, the latter being a very important step most good writers go through, we suggest a rewriting activity by which the teacher could show students an example of an *infographic* created by an anonymous student. The class group, together with the teacher, could examine whether the *infographic* contains the characteristics previously studied in order to improve their own production.

Unit 8: Genre letter to the editor

Unit 8, the last unit of the book, brings a sequence about the genre *letter to the editor*. As that is a more complex genre, which will demand longer texts from the students, it is an appropriate option to place it in the last unit, because, by then, students will have had the opportunity of developing linguistic and discourse aspects in the previous units, expected to prepare them for the most challenging task in the book.

Before the writing task itself, section *Reading Beyond the Words* explores the genre *letter to the editor* with activities regarding its understanding as well as a genre analysis, which can be considered a prewriting stage, so that in section *Put It in Writing*, students are able to carry out the writing. In fact, that is the most comprehensively explored genre in the book, for it includes several stages, consistent with the language in use perspective, so as to promote interaction (Antunes, 2009a; Marcuschi, 2008; Bronckart, 2003).

As in the preceding sequences, the genre is established as well as the purpose: "To express a point of view on a given subject" (Dias, Jucá, & Faria, 2013, p. 152) and the audience: "people interested in the chosen topic" (Dias, Jucá, & Faria, 2013, p. 152.). In the teacher's guide, there is the suggestion for displaying all letters on a board. The guide also orients teachers to plan writing with students by brainstorming ideas, selecting the best ones and organizing the order of arguments. After writing the text, the guide suggests that the teacher conducts revision, preferably, putting the students in pairs. All these procedures can be considered appropriate for the smooth development of the task, which turns out to be interactive.

4.2. Book Two

The introduction of the book (Richmond, 2010, p. 3) highlights the fact that the whole *Freeway* collection is guided by different theoretical and methodological orientations, according to the most updated tendencies. The authors express their concern mainly with working on a thematic basis; exploring language in use, in a communicative approach, based on the chosen genre theory to practice literacy; using critical theories as a foundation for reception and production of texts, expanding language for communication mediated by the computer and considering the most requested didactic and pedagogical possibilities, such as the notion of knowledge construction, through social interaction; and the interdisciplinary potential the different subjects regarding language have.

The book is divided into eight units, organized per sections. Section *Project* appears just after units 2, 4, 6 and 8 and, according to the teacher's guide, for each period of two months, it will provide a special activity as an outcome for the previous two units. The teacher's guide adds that this section enables the production of varied texts that can circulate among students so as the practice of writing "expands to the universe of text creation experiencing, authorship, and individual expression of knowledge acquired throughout the studies of the foreign language" (Richmond, 2010, p. 6) (Our translation).[4]

The book conveys a great concern in practicing language structures and vocabulary previously to the writing sequence (introduction to the situation) and the instructions to carry out the activities are clear and well organized, where there is an attempt to establish a communicative situation. However, in spite of what is stated in the introduction of the book, concerning the idea of exploring language in use, in a communicative approach based on the genre theory, the proposed projects do not always involve a context of communication, an audience and a purpose, which are the foundation of such theory, even though they require a specific genre. This aspect will be further developed and illustrated with examples in the following sections.

Sets of integrated activities guide students towards creating a *poster* in unit 2, a *public announcement service* in unit 4, a *dialog* in unit 6 and another *poster* in unit 8. The section *Project* is the only section in the book with the specific purpose of practicing writing; therefore, it will be the focus of the subsequent analysis.

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[4] Tradução de: "Expande-se para o universo de experimentação da criação textual, da autoria e da expressão individual das apropriações feitas ao longo dos estudos no idioma estrangeiro."

Unit 2: Project The life of immigrants

In the first project of the book, a set of activities was developed in order to provide the reflection about the topic immigration and the creation of a poster about the subject. Activity 1 asks the students' opinion on the reasons why people decide to migrate and the kind of difficulties they might have; activity 2 requires students to look at a picture of some people arriving in New York in the early 1900s and say what they can see; whereas the first part of activity 3 is intended to compare the lives of immigrants in the USA, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, to the lives of immigrants in Brazil at the same time. These three first activities of the sequence have the objective of activating previous knowledge, which relates to the first stage of the writing process, *prewriting,* however, they only focus on the subject itself, as there is no reference to the genre to be produced next: a *poster*.

After the brainstorming on immigration (it is important to add that the topic was also covered in units 1 and 2, in a didactic text), in the second part of activity 3, students are requested to create a *poster*. The instruction for the activity says: "Collect old photos of immigrants. Look for pictures that show scenes of how their lives were, the places they lived in, the clothes they wore, etc. Write about their lives using your ideas from the table" (Richmond, 2010, p. 35).

As students were not exposed to any posters nor a characterization of the genre or even instructions on how to create a poster (prewriting) without the perspective of rewriting it with improvements, it would be probably difficult for them to carry out the writing properly and perhaps it would not achieve the purpose of communication. Indeed, the context of situation, which sets the communicative needs to trigger any linguistic exchange, was not established from the beginning. Another fact that might become an obstacle for students is that there is no mention to the audience. In the teacher's guide, the teachers are instructed to organize an exhibition of all posters, so as each group is able to explain the results of their production to the others, that is, there is an audience, though, during the prewriting and the execution of the task, this is not explicit to the students.

The stage of revision is not taken into account as well, as there is no indication of feedback or rewriting of the text. A suggestion would be to include a detailed checklist regarding some aspects of the genre *poster,* such as its purpose, the type of language normally used, the composition of the text, the order in which information appears, the balance between images and text, among others, so that the students develop autonomy when writing their texts.

Unit 4: Project Creating a PSA video

The second project of the book invites the students to create a PSA video. According to the definition given in the beginning of the sequence "PSA stands for public service announcement. A PSA is an advertisement broadcast on radio or television for the public interest. The objective of a PSA is to convince the audience to take action or adopt a view about a service, an institution, an issue or a cause." (Richmond, 2010, p. 35).

In this project, the genre to be produced is well established, since in the first two activities there are questions to make students aware of their

target audience and the purpose of the genre. Besides that, brainstorming is properly conducted: students are asked to review the issues and causes they have studied in the previous units (3 and 4) to choose the topic they would like to work with.

After that, students are expected to write the text for the PSA, using a checklist. At this stage, two choices made by the organizers of the book should be considered. First, the idea of asking a written genre based on an oral genre. The students were exposed to a PSA beforehand in section *Listening and Speaking*. They listened to this oral genre and had to order sentences according to what they heard. The problem is that they were not exposed to the written version of it, which, probably, had some special features and linguistic components that might be complex to grasp simply by listening. There is not any transcript as well, which would bring them some familiarity with the written text they were supposed to produce. Secondly, the fact that students have to write the text using a checklist instead of guidelines to help them organize ideas and information in a cohesive and coherent way, according to the purpose and characteristics of the genre. While checklists are very important for developing students' autonomy, they could be used in the following stage: the revision, with proper feedback given, either by the teacher or the classmates, followed by a stage afterwards dedicated to rewriting the text according to the feedback. Such activities are essential to aid progress in written language development and to the idea that writing is constructed as a process.

Unit 6: Project False friends

The third project of the book, named *False friends*, starts with a definition for *false friends*: "[they] are pairs of words in two different languages that have very similar spelling or pronunciation but different meaning. Take, for example, the words *carton* in English and *cartão* in Portuguese" (Richmond, 2010, p. 94). After that, two pictures show a *carton*, in English, a container for holding liquids, and a card, in Portuguese, *cartão*.

Afterwards, the students are asked to work in pairs and research other examples of false friends to create a list. Then, they are requested to write a dialog showing examples of misunderstandings between an American exchange student and the student (a Portuguese speaker). Here, once more, the book proposes activities that orient the students to produce a written genre based on an oral one without exposing them to the written version. Moreover, there is no communicative situation in action. In fact, the objective of this sequence is to practice *false friends* and not the ability of writing. In these activities, the focus is the development of language and, according to Harmer (1998), this type of activities will only be suitable for practicing a specific piece of language and not language as a social practice.

After writing their texts, the students are supposed to act out the dialog to the class. Again, there is no reference to revision or rewriting. As the teacher's guide suggests that the activity should be done in pairs, a way to conduct revision would be to ask students to swap dialogs so that each pair could provide feedback to the classmates. All in all, as the instructions for the activity state that "it is important to contrast both Portuguese and English meanings of the false friends", that would be the main criterion to

analyze the text and not the dialog as a genre as such in Bakhtin's (2003) terms, comprising, besides the topic, compositional and linguistic elements.

Unit 8: Project The future ahead of us

The final project of the book "has the objective of offering students an opportunity to explore the impacts of technological advancements in our lives."(Richmond, 2010, p. 54).The result will be a poster to represent life on Earth 30 years from now.

It starts with two activities to be carried out in pairs asking: "How many movies or books about the future can the two of you name?" and "What 'futuristic' things can you find in them?" (Richmond, 2010, p. 124). After that, students are supposed to read a paragraph about how people in 1985 expected the future to be in thirty years' time and complete some information. Then, the students are asked once more to create a poster using the information they gathered from the text of the previous activity. Finally, they will create an exhibition for the class and check their classmates' posters as well.

As the book only brings four activities that practice writing, the choice of proposing the creation of another poster does not take into consideration the possibility of broadening students' language practice. For example, the authors could have brought a more demanding genre, which involves the creation of longer and more complex texts, such as a letter of complaint or an article for a magazine, or, if the level of knowledge the students have does not allow them to produce those specific genres, a comic strip might be a better option.

The last activity requires students to "vote on the poster that best represents life on planet Earth thirty years from now", so here the audience is established. However, no reference is made to the communicative purpose of the poster, and which language resources should be used in order to obtain a certain effect on the readers. Moreover, lack of information on how to create a poster remain and, again, since there is no reference to revision, the concept of writing as a process comprised of stages was not taken into consideration.

A word about the text genres selected seems to be in order at this point. Apparently, the writers of the two books have chosen various text genres of interest to teenagers. Book One offers a greater diversity of genres and communicative purposes, including a ludic genre (rap) while Book Two proposes three genres of which one (a dialog) is not as demanding as desirable for the level, for instance. On the other hand, they propose an activity developed using new technological devices (a video). In this respect, both books suggest the use of digital resources (sites on the internet, for instance) to research on certain topics, which, according to Prensky (2012b) are trivial ways of using such resources, not enough to empower students. We follow the author in the argument that digital activities and resources should be used to develop creativity and result in contributions or innovations of some sort. Otherwise they only represent new ways (digital) of doing the same old activities (texts, exercises, summaries, etc).

On the whole, *High Up* activities intended at writing are consistent with the theoretical underpinnings proposed by its authors, mainly the ones with reference to the use of written texts of different genres (a testimonial, a rap, an infographic. a letter to the editor) to interact in real-life situations in society,

relying on a context of situation. In contrast, the writing activities presented in *Freeway*, though constructed around text genres (posters, a PSA video, a dialog) and introduced so as to activate students' previous knowledge, lack contextualization and communicative purpose. If we lose sight of the main aim of language learning and teaching, which is communication, the use of text genres *per se* would not be sufficient. What really helps students develop writing abilities for life is the context of communication, the communicative needs and purposes, the way language is organized into a recognizable social format to convey meaning to an interactant. In this respect, we argue that materials which organize tasks aiming at interaction are more likely to support students discourse competence than the ones that offer only decontextualized exercises on linguistic aspects and texts (even if they take different genre formats) to be analyzed and understood or produced.

5. FINAL REMARKS

This study had the purpose of identifying, in two different textbooks, activities and procedures devised to help students develop writing abilities to interact in social situations (and this includes the school environment). Besides, this investigation aimed at understanding the reasons why an EFL teacher should teach writing; listing different types of activities and procedures for developing writing as a skill in a formal educational setting; assessing different forms of feedback for student writing; and, finally, offering suggestions to improve textbook activities that are not consistent with genre theory put into practice within a teaching sequence. Most importantly, such analyses were carried out under the belief that teaching approaches and activities rely on theoretical assumptions. The ability to identify these assumptions in teaching materials gives teachers and teachers-to-be a sound basis not only to evaluate the consistency of the activities, but to adapt and create their own materials in an informed way. We do consider the ability to connect theory and practice an essential requirement for teaching professionals.

To sum up the analyses of the two coursebooks, as previously expected, due to the latest language teaching tendencies, in the introduction both books expose their concerns in dealing with language, and, in this specific case, written language, in a communication-oriented approach, taking into consideration genre theory. In spite of that, a great difference was found between the books: while the *High up* book truly took the theory the authors are said to believe into action, bringing activities that practiced genres with a focus on communication, not leaving behind aspects of language and the stages of a teaching sequence, the *Freeway* book shows that the editors' attempt to use genres in teaching writing was not that successful, since most activities do not comprise a context of situation and the genre ended up being used as an excuse to teach a specific piece of language instead of leading to communication.

The findings of this paper might be used by teachers, firstly, to help develop a critical and informed way of looking into published teaching materials in order to be better equipped to select textbooks and activities as well as to devise their own teaching materials. Secondly, they might

achieve more effective results in facilitating the English language learning in communicative contexts, namely when dealing with writing, an ability that has been neglected in Brazilian schools, which are normally more concerned with teaching reading, as that is the ability more likely to be requested in any future exams, such as *vestibular*. If we agree on the importance of writing as a social practice, such perspective should be reconsidered, since language is composed of many abilities and competences that ought to be worked with in a balanced manner. If teachers desire to do so and obtain improvement in developing writing abilities for real communication, a possibly efficient manner is the perspective of the genre theory, the teaching sequence and writing as a process, inserted in a meaningful context.

The limitation of this research must be taken into consideration though. The sample analyzed (two books) cannot be counted as enough neither can the list of criteria applied in the analysis. In fact, this should be seen as a preliminary study concerned mainly with the potential of theoretically based teaching materials aimed at discourse competence as facilitating factor and enabling students to communicate in writing. It is important to highlight that further studies should be done, considering not only the point of view of a book writer, who developed activities, or the teacher, who put them into practice, but also the perspective of the student who executed such activities.

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