

**A critical analysis of the genre reader's letter in the newspaper Zero Hora / Análise crítica do gênero carta do leitor no jornal gaúcho Zero Hora**

*Francieli Matzenbacher Pinton\**  
*Cristiane Gonçalves\*\**

**ABSTRACT**

This article presents an analysis of the genre Reader's letter, published by the newspaper *Zero Hora*, by means of a thorough evaluation of its compositional structure. It intends to verify to what extent the rhetorical moves identified in the texts concretize the social purpose of this genre. In order to do so, we have based the theoretical and methodological references on the sociohistorical and dialogic conception of language presented by Bakhtin (1997 and 2003) and on the Genre Analysis presented by the sociorhetorical perspective (MILLER, 2009, 2012, BAZERMAN, 2006). The corpus consisted of 17 Reader's Letters published in the second half of August in 2017. The results point to the existence of three rhetorical moves in the letters: contextualization (specifying the theme and situating the reader), opinion (evaluating and justifying one's point of view) and closure (emphasizing one's opinion). Regarding the second and third moves of the Letters there was a balance between positive and negative evaluations, which demonstrates some control by the Editorial board on the publications (due to the selection of the texts).

**KEYWORDS:** Critical Genre Analysis; Reader's letter; *Zero Hora*.

**RESUMO**

*Realizamos, neste artigo, uma análise crítica da Carta do Leitor veiculada pelo jornal gaúcho Zero Hora, por meio do exame detalhado de sua construção composicional, com o objetivo de verificar em que medida os movimentos e passos retóricos identificados no texto concretizam o propósito social desse gênero. Para isso, nossos referenciais teórico-metodológicos estão fundamentados na concepção sócio-histórica e dialógica da linguagem apresentada por Bakhtin (1997 e 2003) e na Análise de Gênero pela perspectiva da sociorretórica (MILLER, 2009, 2012 e BAZERMAN, 2006). O corpus selecionado para análise constitui-se de 17 Cartas do Leitor publicadas na segunda quinzena do mês de agosto deste ano. Os resultados da pesquisa apontam para a existência de três movimentos retóricos nas Cartas: contextualização, opinião e fechamento. Os passos que constituem esses movimentos são: contextualização (“explicitar o tema” e “situar o leitor”); opinião (“avaliar” e “justificar o ponto de vista”); fechamento (“enfatizar a opinião”). No segundo e terceiro movimentos das Cartas, constatamos um equilíbrio entre as avaliações positivas e negativas, o que demonstra certo controle por parte da Redação sobre as publicações (em virtude da seleção dos textos).*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Análise Crítica de Gênero; Carta do Leitor; *Zero Hora*.

**1 Introduction**

It is widely known that genres are part of our lives and play an important social function, helping us in the myriad of communicative situations to which we are daily

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\* Doutorado em letras, professora da Universidade Federal de Santa Maria UFSM, Santa Maria (Rio Grande do Sul), francieli.matzenbacher@gmail.com

\*\* Bacharel em Letras, Universidade Federal de Santa Maria UFSM, Santa Maria (Rio Grande do Sul), crisgoncalves09@gmail.com

exposed. They emerge from our constant need of interaction/expression in many contexts and environments. Due to their dynamicity, which allows them to adapt to multiple circumstances, the number of existing genres is abundant. Despite their variety, genres present certain structural patterns and relatively defined features, which allow us to identify and distinguish them.

Many authors have engaged in the study of textual genres in order to recognize and distinguish genres from one another by describing and explaining their peculiarities. It is our intention, in this article, to analyze the genre Reader's Letter due to its importance as an instrument of communication between readers and the medium that publishes it – be it a magazine or a newspaper.

Initially, we investigated previous studies on the genre Reader's Letter. Costa (2005), for example, explores its goal, and Passos (2007) describes its structure. However, none of the authors has focused on the functioning of the letters based on their rhetorical organization. In this sense, we intend to broaden the studies of this genre by engaging into a critical analysis to highlight this feature. To do so, we selected the Reader's Letter published by the Gaucho newspaper *Zero Hora* and proceeded to a detailed examination of its compositional structure in order to verify to which degree the rhetorical moves that constitute it materialize the social purpose of this genre.

To answer our goal, we have organized this article in four sections, besides this Introduction and the Final Considerations. In the first section, divided in two subsections, we provide the theoretical and methodological support employed to analyze the genre Reader's Letter critically. In the second section, we describe the analytical procedures used. In the third section, we present some of the results obtained after this research. In the fourth and last section, we conclude the presentation of our findings and discuss them.

## **2 Genre: concept and functions**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bakhtin developed the concept of speech genre<sup>1</sup> under a sociohistorical and dialogical perspective of the communicative process. According to his concept, language is produced through an interactive relationship between two

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<sup>1</sup> In this text, we adopt the term *textual genre*, following Charles Bazerman.

individuals, in which one of them (the speaker) produces an utterance to the other (the listener).

To Bakhtin and Voloshinov, “utterance as such is wholly a product of social interaction, both of the immediate sort as determined by the circumstances of the discourse, and of the more general kind, as determined by the whole aggregate of conditions under which any given community of speakers operates.” (BAKHTIN; VOLOSHINOV, 1997, p. 121<sup>2</sup>) Therefore, all countless areas of human activities are related to the usage of language, done in many diverse ways among users, presenting as consequence the great multiplicity of genres to which we have access in our daily lives.

As aforementioned, in Bakhtin’s perspective, one uses language materializing it in the format of utterances, be they oral or written, which are shared among the members of a certain field of social activity. In this sense, Bakhtin ([1950] 2003, p. 261) observes that:

These utterances reflect the specific conditions and the goals of each referred field not only because of their content (thematic) and by their style of language, that is, by the selection of lexical, phraseological and grammatical resources of the language, but, above all, because of their compositional structure.<sup>3</sup>

The Russian philosopher argues that the elements theme, style and composition connect to each other in an indissoluble way in the utterance, being defined by the particularities of this or that sphere of communication, such as the specific situation of utterance production and the choices made by individuals, for example. Thus, Bakhtin ([1950] 2003, p. 262) emphasizes that “each particular utterance is individual, but each field of language use elaborates their own relatively stable types of utterance,” which he calls speech genres. To him, “even on the most laid-back and casual chat we shape our speech by certain genre forms” (BAKHTIN, [1950] 2003, p. 282).

In order to clarify what he understands about each of the elements of the utterance, Bakhtin defines the thematic content as that which expresses a concrete historical situation that originated the enunciation. Therefore, the linguistic forms integrating the composition are not the only ones that determine the utterance, but also the extra verbal elements of the situation. Style, he continues, is seen as an element

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<sup>2</sup> This quote was taken from the original book in English written by Voloshinov. See VOLOSHINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the philosophy of language*. (Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik). Seminar Press: New York and London, 1973, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> From now on, all quotes taken from the Portuguese have been translated by the author.

“indissolubly tied to the utterance and the typical forms of utterances, that is, the speech genres.” (BAKHTIN, [1950] 2003, p. 265); it can be defined by the dialogical interaction between two or more persons. The compositional structure is seen as a standardized pattern that society follows in a speech construction. This means that a pre-established linguistic and textual organization exists for each speech genre.

In light of this discussion, we can say that, when Bakhtin assumes utterances as typical and historical forms of speech genres, he conceives three constitutive dimensions for these and attributes the same social, discursive and dialogic character for them. In this perspective, one of the main contributions of Bakhtin’s study of genres was the acknowledgement of their social nature. From his reflections, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, several theoretical propositions emerged. One of them was Caroline Miller’s understanding of genre as a form of social action, following a socio-rhetoric approach.

To Miller ([1984] 2009), genres constitute “typified rhetorical actions”, that is, certain ways of acting in circumstances in a given cultural context. In her conception, “a genre is a rhetorical way to mediate private intentions and social demand; it is the motivator when it connects the private and the public, the singular and the recurring” (MILLER, [1984] 2009, p. 41). The author also conceives the concept of rhetorical community as the cultural base of genres, and affirms that these “[...] work as keys to the comprehension of how to participate in the actions of a community” (MILLER, [1984] 2009, p. 44).

In a later essay, Miller further develops the concept of rhetorical community and begins to understand genre as “the aspect of located communication capable of reproduction, which can manifest in more than one situation, in more than one concrete space-time.” (MILLER, 2012, p. 50). In this case, the researcher also sees genre as “[...] a specific and important *component* of society, a primary aspect of its communicative structure, one of the structures of power that institutions exercise.”

Miller’s considerations dialogue with the thought of other researchers, like the American Charles Bazerman, who highlights, in his studies, the concepts of social fact, speech act, genre, genre sets and genre systems, and activity system. In his understanding, “these concepts suggest how people create new realities of signification,

relations and knowledge, making use of texts” (BAZERMAN, 2006, p. 19). That way, Bazerman (2006, p. 22) defines social facts as

[...] significant social actions performed by language or speech acts. These acts are performed through standardized textual forms, typical, and, therefore, intelligible, or genres, that are related to other texts and genres that occur in related circumstances. Together, the various types of texts settle in genre sets inside genre systems, which are part of the systems of human activities.

Social facts are also seen as “[...] the things that people believe to be true, and, thus, affect the way they define a situation” (BAZERMAN, 2006, p. 23). According to the author, many social facts depend on speech acts, which were classified in three levels in the theory initially formulated by John L. Austin and later refined by J. R. Searle: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. They mean, respectively, what is said in a literal way, the act that is intended to be recognized by the listener and the real effect that it causes in the listener.

In this sense, Bazerman (2006, p. 29) suggests a way to better coordinate our speech acts with each other: we should give preference to the use of familiar and/or recognizable utterances, that is, we should act in a typical way, “easily recognized modes as performers of certain acts in certain circumstances”. These “communicative patterns” or “typified forms” are known as genres.

Based on the above, Bazerman understands genres as “psychosocial recognition phenomena”, which are part of the processes of socially organized activities. More specifically, Bazerman (2006, p. 31) defines genres as

[...] the types that people recognize as being used by themselves and by others. Genres are what we believe them to be. That is, they are social facts about the types of speech acts that people can accomplish and about the means of accomplishing them. Genres emerge in social processes in which people try to understand each other sufficiently well enough to coordinate activities and share meanings in sight of their own practical purposes.

In this perspective, he develops the concepts of genre sets, of genre systems and of activity systems, so that one can characterize the genre configuration and their framework “in organizations, roles and broader activities.” To the author, a genre set is “the collection of text types that a person in a certain role tends to produce

(BAZERMAN, 2006, p. 32). A civil engineer, for example, “[...] must write proposals, service orders, reports of the progress of the work, reports of quality tests, security evaluations and a limited number of other similar documents. (BAZERMAN, 2006, p. 32). A genre system, on the other hand,

consists of diverse genre sets utilized by people that work together in an organized fashion, and also the standardized relations that are established in the production, circulation and use of these documents (BAZERMAN, 2006, p. 32).

Finally, the linguist understands that the system of activities encompasses the genre system and helps us think about what we do and in what way texts help us do it, instead of seeing them as finite in themselves.

In the next subsection, we address the genre Reader’s letter, object of analysis in this text.

### **3 The Reader’s Letter**

Throughout history, letters have been used as a way to lessen the distance between persons, being a form of communication for diverse purposes, such as to thank, to charge, to complain, to advertise or to give information, for example. This genre, according to Paiva (2004), was created in Ancient Greece and was initially used for political, administrative and military subjects. Later on, they started being used for private messages, and, gradually, for varied ends such as religion, documentation, recording of family stories, etc.

According to Marcuschi (2007), thanks to the malleability, dynamicity and plasticity of genres, which adapt to sociocultural necessities and activities, as well as technological innovations, the letter genre has evolved and originated others, like the love letter, the family letter, the intimate letter, the official letter, the open letter, the commercial letter, among others. However, according to the referred author, the new emergent genres are not absolute innovations, but rather, in the words of Bakhtin (1997), “transmutations” of existing genres.

In this study, the object of analysis is a specific letter – the Reader’s Letter, a genre inserted in the journalistic context, relayed by written means of communication,

in predetermined sections of newspapers and/or magazines. Our choice is justified since this genre fulfills “an important social function in the sense that it allows the exchange of information, ideas, opinions between different persons of a certain group” (PASSOS, 2007, p. 81). Furthermore, it is a genre that allows, especially, the interaction between readers and the means of communication.

As the name suggests, the Reader’s Letter is produced by readers, namely the ones that read newspapers and magazines. Depending on the editorial line of these media and the demands of the target audience, the authors of the Letters write with diverse goals, such as –maybe the main one – interacting with an article or report previously published (complimenting or criticizing them). According to Costa (2005, p. 28),

the reader’s letters have turned in the thermometer that indicates the degree of success of the articles published in newspapers, since readers write reacting, positively or negatively, to what they have read. Moreover, they allow readers to interact with the newspaper, giving it an idea of their expectations about the editorial line.

However, based on Passos (2007), we can see that the Reader’s Letter is not written by a single individual. According to the author, when the text is sent to the editorial board, it presents a structure very similar to the letter genre, being transformed before it is published<sup>4</sup>. Such change may actually not be carried out, since it depends on the editor’s decision. About this intervention on the Reader’s Letter, Melo (1999 apud PASSOS, 2007, p. 84) states that the modifications subjected to the original text reach the level of a reformulation of what was said by the author, showing the power that the newspaper/magazine has over the dialogue between readers.

The influence on the composition of genres also shows a relation with its support, since the text needs to be adapted to the specific format of the physical or digital medium that relays it. About this, Marcuschi (2008, p. 174) clarifies that “[...] the support is not neutral, and the genre is not indifferent to it. It is of utmost relevance for the circulation of genres in society and must have some influence in the nature of the supported genre.” Bezerra (2007, p. 211), in this regard, states that “for reasons of physical space or argumentative guidance (in favor of the newspaper/magazine)”, letters “can be summarized, paraphrased or have some information eliminated”.

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<sup>4</sup> We clarify that the only version considered in our work is the latest one, already edited by the newspaper/magazine.

Due to the necessity of adjusting to the support and of having to meet current society's demands, the Reader's Letter exhibits a short text, offering a fast reading. Additionally, this genre presents a simple and formal style, with accessible language to the audience of the newspaper/magazine. This target audience is unknown, since there is no familiarity between the one who writes and the ones who read. For this reason, according to Passos (2007), the sender uses strategic resources so the reader has the impression of being close to each other.

About the organization mode of the text, according to Costa and Fuzer (2012, p. 6), "the argumentative-dissertative mode prevails, and it may also have narrative, descriptive, injunctive and expositive passages." The extent of the Reader's Letter, according to these authors, is usually limited by the editor, such as what happens with letters sent to the newspaper *Zero Hora* (objects of this study), which have a maximum number of characters allowed. In the next section, we describe the methodological procedures we adopted in our research to analyze this genre.

#### 4 Methodology

The universe of analysis of this investigation is the Gaucho newspaper *Zero Hora*, specifically the section titled "Reader", which is subdivided into three parts: the "Reader's Photo", the "Comment(s)" and "About ZH". The focus of our study is on the content of the third part. The *corpus* is composed of 17 texts, which were collected in the second fortnight of August 2017, as exhibited by Chart 1.

Chart 1 – The corpus

Number	Date	Author	Credential	Location
C#1	14 Aug. 2017	Luís Sérgio M. Lucas	Micro-entrepreneur	Porto Alegre/RS
C#2	14 Aug. 2017	Maria Lurdes Derenji	Retiree	Canoas/RS
C#3	14 Aug. 2017	Lúcia Tostes Mottin	Dentist	Porto Alegre/RS
C#4	14 Aug. 2017	Carol Majewski	Lawyer	Porto Alegre/RS
C#5	15 Aug. 2017	Paulo Aronna	Commercial representative	Capão da Canoa/RS
C#6	15 Aug. 2017	Heloisa dos Reis	Housewife	Porto Alegre/RS
C#7	26 and 27 Aug. 2017	Assis Vieira	Journalist	Montenegro/RS
C#8	26 and 27 Aug. 2017	Paulo Sérgio Arisi	Journalist	Porto Alegre/RS



C#9	26 and 27 Aug. 2017	José Airton A. Muñoz	Retiree	Alegrete/RS
C#10	26 and 27 Aug. 2017	Jaime Pacheco Alves	Retiree	Osório/RS
C#11	28 Aug. 2017	Ângela Candelot	Entrepreneur	Porto Alegre/RS
C#12	28 Aug. 2017	Irene de Marco Ferreira	Teacher	Rio Grande/RS
C#13	28 Aug. 2017	Luís Felipe Tavares	Engineer	Porto Alegre/RS
C#14	28 Aug. 2017	Paulo Roberto Chedid	Public Servant	Porto Alegre/RS
C#15	29 Aug. 2017	José Miguel Bittencourt	Industrial Technician	Viamão/RS
C#16	30 Aug. 2017	Roberto M. Coelho	Commercial representative	Porto Alegre/RS
C#17	30 Aug. 2017	Jórgia Carbonera	Lawyer	Porto Alegre/RS

Regarding our analytical procedures, we initially offered a contextual analysis of the genre through a documental research about the newspaper *Zero Hora*, which conveys it. Our intention, in this period, was to find data indicative of production, circulation and distribution of the mentioned support. The information was collected from two websites of the RBS Group. In a second moment of the study, we moved on to the analysis of the Reader section, observing how its content was presented on the newspaper. We determined its subdivision into three parts, and concluded that only one of them, titled “About ZH”, would have relevance for our research, because, if compared to others, is the one that aggregates the larger number of potential features – especially in the composition – of the textual genre at hand. For this reason, we have considered only “About ZH” as the Reader’s Letter itself.

Therefore, the following moment was the textual-discursive analysis of the section “About ZH”, through mapping of the rhetorical organization of texts, in terms of moves and steps, and the identification of linguistic marks employed by the authors. As the last procedure, we verified the recurrence of this compositional structure in the letters, relating it to the description of the genre to comprehend to what extent its social purpose is materialized in the text.

## 5 Contextual Analysis of the Genre Reader’s Letter

The newspaper *Zero Hora*<sup>5</sup>, a communication medium that disseminates the genre of interest for this research, circulates daily in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and some cities in Santa Catarina, in physical and virtual medium. Recently, it has been present in social networks too (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Google+). Founded in 1964, headquartered in the city of Porto Alegre, by the RBS Group, the newspaper is composed of twelve sections, and counts with more than two hundred journalists, a branch in Brasilia and more than one hundred columnists.

This particular newspaper was chosen thanks to its considerable representativeness, not only in Rio Grande do Sul, but in Brazil. One of the five biggest of the country, the newspaper *Zero Hora*, according to the website Meio&Mensagem<sup>6</sup>, was the only one to show an increase in circulation in January 2016, compared to the same period of the previous year (it went from 197, 322 to 200, 707 daily copies). In January 2017, according to a report by the Institute for Communication Verification (IVC, in the Portuguese acronym), the average of copies<sup>7</sup> was 205,894 per day, which is evidence of a continuous growth of the RBS Group's newspaper.

The Reader section, which follows the newspaper's daily publication, is edited by journalist Ana Karina Giacomelli, who receives the original letters sent by readers through the email address [leitor@zerohora.com.br](mailto:leitor@zerohora.com.br). In this section, there is a note from the editorial board explaining the maximum character limit accepted for texts, which is 700, and the requirement for sending some of the author's personal data, such as name, occupation, address and phone number. Additionally, there is also a message stating that the Editorial Department reserves the right of selecting the letters to be published and summarizing them, if necessary.

As mentioned before, three parts make the Reader section of the newspaper *Zero Hora*: the "Reader's Photo", the "Comment(s)" and "About ZH". In the first part, there is a photo sent by the newspaper readers, normally registering a beautiful scene/landscape or a tourist spot of gaucho cities, as seen in Picture 1.

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<sup>5</sup> All information about the newspaper *Zero Hora* presented in this section was taken from the websites <http://www.gruporbs.com.br> and <http://comercial.gruporbs.com.br/veiculos/zero-hora>

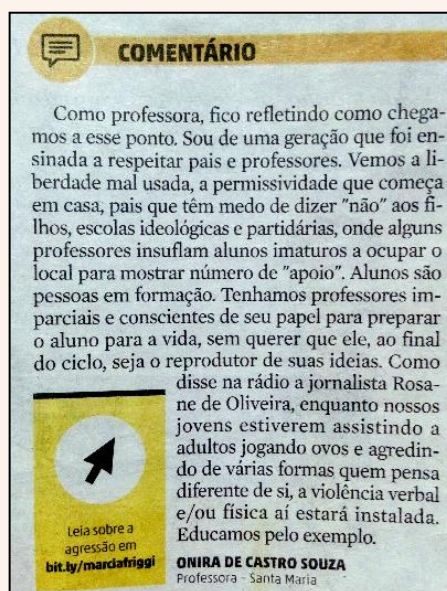
<sup>6</sup>Media-specialized website. Link to the aforementioned publication: [www.meioemensagem.com.br/home/midia/2017/02/20/circulacao-media-dos-grandes-jornais-cai-em-2016.html](http://www.meioemensagem.com.br/home/midia/2017/02/20/circulacao-media-dos-grandes-jornais-cai-em-2016.html)

<sup>7</sup> The IVC data refer to the totality of each title's circulation, not discriminating between printed and digital copies.



Picture 1 – Reader's Photo

In the second part, there are comments from readers – usually of a negative content – concerning relevant issues of everyday life/present time, be they from the spheres of society, politics, economics, etc. We realized, in one of the seventeen letters analyzed, that the subject of the comment showed relation with a report previously published on the newspaper. In this case, as we can see in Picture 2, besides the comment there was an icon of an arrow and an access link to the online version of the publication, to allow the reader to understand the reference behind the text.



Picture 2 – Comments

In the third part, in a similar way to what happens in the “Comment(s)” section, critical texts from readers of the newspaper *Zero Hora* are displayed. The arrow icons and the access links to the online version of the publications whose content motivated the reader to write (Picture 3) also appear in “About ZH”. However, the recurrence of these elements in the third part is more expressive, since they appear in eight of the seventeen letters of the *corpus*. That is because the first objective of their authors, unlike to what happens in the second part, is to interact directly with the communication vehicle. In “About ZH”, the readers always refer to the components of the journal, presenting their opinion through a positive or negative evaluation. The focus can be on the sections, on the columns, on the reports, on the articles and chronicles, or, still, on the journalists/writers themselves.



Picture 3 – About ZH

As aforementioned, we chose to consider, between the three parts that make the Reader section of the newspaper *Zero Hora*, only “About ZH” as the “Reader’s Letter” itself, because its structure answered more productively to what we previously described about this specific genre. Therefore, we must clarify that, from now on, every time we mention the Reader’s Letter we will be referring to the “About ZH” section.

## 6 Rhetorical Organization of the Reader’s Letter

Like all genres, the Reader's letter is also written according to a schematic structure, which materializes its communicative purpose. This organization happens through the so-called rhetorical moves, which are formed by certain steps. In our textual-discursive analysis, we determined that the Reader's Letter of the newspaper *Zero Hora* usually present three rhetorical moves: contextualization, opinion and closure. They appear in all texts, but do not necessarily follow this same sequence. Chart 2 demonstrates the schematic structure of the Letter, with the rhetorical moves and steps that form it:

Chart 2 – Rhetorical moves and steps of the Reader's Letter of the newspaper *Zero Hora*

Moves	Steps
M1 Contextualization	1A Specifying the theme and 1B Situating the reader
M2 Opinion	2A Evaluating and 2B Justifying one's point of view
M3 Closure	3A Emphasizing one's opinion

The first rhetorical move (contextualization) is composed of two steps (which also do not obey the same order in the Letters): the author specifies the theme to be talked about (Step 1), be it an article, a chronicle or a column, news/reports or even a journalist/writer, and situates the reader (Step 2), identifying the date/edition in which it was relayed. Occasionally, it also mentions its location on the newspaper (on the front or back cover, in a specific section or column, when it is the case). In the following examples, we present excerpts that corroborate the contextualization move, with the two steps highlighted.

Example 1:

L#1

About the articles that address the theme "Bandidolatria" (*Step 1*) (ZH, 12 and 13/08) (*Step 2*), [...].

Example 2:

L#5

About the report of the stagnated transportation (*Step 1*) (ZH, 12 and 13/08) (*Step 2*), [...].

Example 3:

L#13

About the chronicle, "The character revealed in confession" (*Step 1*) (ZH, 26 and 27/08) (*Step 2*), [...].

Based on these examples, we can perceive some content markers (“About”) as a recurring linguistic mark in the contextualization move, which allows identifying Step 1 (specifying the theme). On the other hand, Step 2 (situating the reader) is normally marked by the newspaper’s designation and by the display of the date in which the Letter was published, or, in other examples, by place markers (*in section X, in column Y, on that report*) and/or possession (*by writer X, from column Y, by such author*).

In the second rhetorical move (opinion), the reader/author of the letter displays his evaluation about the referred theme, making a positive or negative evaluation (Step 1) and justifying his point of view (Step 2). We can observe the accomplishment of the opinion move in the examples below, where the two steps are highlighted:

Example 4:

L#2

Brilliant (*Step 1*) chronicle [...] To be read laughing (*Step 1*). Carpinejar is fantastic (*Steps 1 and 2*). From shoes to pins, he can write incredible chronicles (*Steps 1 and 2*).

Example 5:

L#7

[...] An unequivocal sample that human stupidity has no limits. (*Step 1*). I am convinced that the human being was something that went wrong during creation. Like the French actor Brigitte Bardot: “Men are beasts and even beasts don’t behave as they do.”[...] (*Step 2*)

Example 6:

L#17

I want to compliment (*Step 1*) the text [...] I found it very relevant to the current political moment of the country and the valorization of our artistic production (*Steps 1 and 2*).

In this move, we identified the recurring use of first person of speech, which shows the personal nature of the evaluation done in this context. In Step 1 (evaluate), the approval or disapproval of the theme/fact by the writer is signaled by the use of words and/or evaluative expressions, such as adjectives (brilliant, fantastic, incredible, relevant) and verbs (found, compliment, laughing, can write). In other Letters, the adjectives “beautiful”, “good”, “false”, “enriching”, “unhappy”, “chaotic”, “thrilling” and the verbs “to congratulate”, “to applaud”, “killing”, “to offend”, etc. In Step 2 (justify the point of view), to make the justification the author utilizes, occasionally, some arguments, such as exemplifications. It is interesting to note that the logical-semantic relation is normally not highlighted by the use of discourse markers.

The third move (closure) is made of only one step, in which the producer emphasizes the position taken about the theme. For that purpose, they resort to, normally, a sentence that summarizes their evaluation. We can observe the one-step of the closure move in the following examples.

Example 7:

L#8

[...] And ethical values are also out of print. (*Step 1*)

Example 8:

L#3

[...] Life is construction: it doesn't come ready. (*Step 1*)

Example 9:

L#2

[...] Congratulations and most success to the columnist (*Step 1*)

As we can note in the excerpts, Step 1 is characterized by the use of verbs in the present (are, is, come) and nouns (values, construction, success, print). In other Letters, we have verified, too, the presence of adjectives (shameful, regrettable, accessible, dependent, large, unconditional, brief), which reinforce the evaluation done in the previous stages, demonstrating the certainty of the text's author about his opinion.

To make explicit the compositional structure of the text under analysis, we present, in Example 10, the rhetorical organization of the Reader's Letter number 12. In it, we can identify the three rhetorical moves, with their respective steps. We highlighted, in red, the contextualization move (M1); in green, the opinion move (M2), and, in blue, the closure move (M3). We stress that the order of presentation of the moves in this example is not linear, which reveals, to a certain extent, the knowledge of the producer about the genre.

Example 10:

L#12 08/28/2017 – Irene de Marco Ferreira (Teacher – Rio Grande)

M2→ It's marvelous to be able to read (*Step 2A*) M1→ on the newspaper (*Step 1B*) M1→ the analysis that Guto Leite does of the music *Tua Cantiga*, by Chico Buarque (*Step 1A*) M1→ (ZH, August 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>). (*STEP 1B*) M2→ As a recent graduate of Linguists and Teaching of Portuguese Language in the Federal University of Rio Grande, I can only give thanks for the publishing of this enriching text. (*Step 2B*) M3 → The analysis shown, in a brief and accessible way, to me, an unconditional fan of Chico Buarque, feeds the wonder I have with the power that knowledge of language gives to human beings. (*Step 3A*)

From the identification of the described rhetorical moves, we can outline the main objective of the Reader's Letter of the newspaper *Zero Hora*: the interaction between the newspaper and its audience, who writes to the newspaper's editorial board to show their contentment or discontent with what is being transmitted and/or with the way it is being written. That positively engages with Costa's view (2005) on the Reader's Letter as a sort of thermometer to assess the degree of acceptance of the newspaper by part of the reading community. Besides, thanks to the public nature of circulation, the reader can also interact with other readers, with society in general, that reads the Letter and has equal right of reaction, being able to agree with or disagree with the opinion shown.

In this sense, we have determined that there is a balance between the opinions with positive evaluations and the ones with negative evaluations, which demonstrates a certain amount of control by the editorial board, which selects the texts to be published according to their interests, corroborating what we showed in Section 2.1 of this work. In light of this, investigating which issues received one or other kind of evaluation, we encountered the following: the Letters exhibiting criticism or disapproval normally cite news/reports about issues which are "external" to the newspaper, regarding reality, such as political or economic matters (corruption, tax raises, privatizations of state-run companies), social problems (lack of access to education and basic sanitation), among others. The Letters with approval and compliments, on the other hand, are about the components of the journal (articles, reports, columns, among others) that exhibit light-hearted and of pleasant reading. However, we noticed the preponderance of reader's acceptance when it specifically comes to the ones responsible for this kind of publication (columnists, writers). In the examples below, we show excerpts that make explicit the topics of Letters with positive and negative evaluations, respectively:

Example 11:

C#12

It's marvelous to be able to read on the newspaper the analysis that Guto Leite does of the music *Tua Cantiga*, by Chico Buarque [...]. [...], I can only give thanks for the publishing of this enriching text. The analysis shown, in a brief and accessible way, to me, an unconditional fan of Chico Buarque, feeds the wonder I have with the power that knowledge of language gives to human beings.

Example 12:

C#9



The shamelessness of Renan Calheiros is impressive. I've seen many acts of people without character, but Renan has overcome them all. Only in Brazil, to exist such scum, like the senator and ex-president Lula, that accepted sharing the podium with Renan and his son [...]

## **Final Considerations**

In this research, we reported a critical analysis of the textual genre Reader's Letter, relayed by the gaucho newspaper *Zero Hora*, during the second fortnight of August of 2017. We chose this genre, among the countless others in that communicative vehicle, taking into consideration its relevance as an instrument for exchange of information, ideas and opinions, between people of a certain social group.

Initially, we reviewed the main theoretical perspectives about the genre, presenting the different approaches about its concept and functionality. We showed some methodological principles for the accomplishment of the critical analysis. In a second moment, we described the characteristics of the Reader's Letter, through the propositions of different authors, considering its origin in the letter genre to its evolution to present day.

With this stage fulfilled, we moved on to contextual analysis, seeking to characterize the newspaper *Zero Hora* in its context of production and circulation. To choose this communication vehicle specifically, we considered its relevance nationwide. Such eminence was achieved thanks to its constant search for a larger proximity with the reading community, possible due to its presence on several social networks, for example. Still in this period, we analyzed the Reader section of the referred newspaper, coming to the realization that it was subdivided in three parts, with only one being relevant to our study. That was because it brought together the largest number of potential characteristics within the ones we described in the section concerning genre.

Our next step was making the textual-discursive analysis of the "About ZH" section, which we selected as the proper Reader's letter. During this step, we sought to know to what extent the Reader's Letter allows for interaction between the reading community and its propagation support, as well as the one between its components. For that purpose, we mapped the genre's compositional structure, focused on the rhetorical organization, verifying the moves and steps that make up the Letters, which are responsible for the materialization of its communicative purpose. The schematic

description pointed to the existence of three rhetorical moves: contextualization, opinion and closure, made of one or two steps each. We explored, in the study's subsequent phase, the recurrent linguistic markers in the consolidation of the moves and steps, verifying how the language choices and compositional structure projected, in the texts, the interests, evaluations and points of view of the Letter's author about the chosen themes.

Based on our findings, we interpreted the position of the texts' producers, who, in general, evaluate positively the components of the newspaper, especially when they bring pleasant reading content. Nevertheless, when the subject of the reports is of an unpleasant nature, like social problems, criticism and disapproval are inevitable. We realized, still, that the reader/author of the Letter only demonstrates a personal reaction to a certain fact, not presenting a defense of their views with more complex argumentative strategies such as using the voice of an authority on the text, for example. They simply show their opinion and justify their point of view, resorting to, in some cases, exemplifications in order to better express it. Yet, since we did not have access to the originals, we cannot claim these arguments never existed. In this sense, we asked ourselves about the editing done by the editorial department, which can suppress or modify excerpts of the Letter in virtue of the space predetermined/made available for the reader to express him/herself on the newspaper. These textual manipulations can also be done due to the ideologies (political, economic, social, etc.) that the RBS Group, founder of the *Zero Hora*, seeks to spread.

Therefore, we can infer, to a certain extent, that the interaction fulfils the interest of the newspaper, which, as we mentioned in sections 2.2 and 4, selects the texts it receives and reserves the right to publish them or not, as well as to edit them if it is deemed necessary. The predominance of Letters coming from the region known as Grande Porto Alegre can be a fact that corroborates this triage done by the editorial department; from the gaúcho capital alone, where the *Zero Hora* Headquarters is located, 10 Letters are collected, from a corpus with a total of 17. Despite that, it is evident that the newspaper *Zero Hora* has good acceptance by part of the readers, confirmed by its growing popularity in recent years, as we indicated in Section 4.

We conclude, with this work, that the textual genre Reader's Letter fulfils its social function and communicative purpose, intermediating the relations between

readers and the journal that relays them, as well as the interaction of those between themselves. However, we do not put an end to our analysis, because we are aware of some limitations, such as a deeper investing of the context of genre, or even the collection of a larger *corpus*. Another aspect would be to interview the journalist Ana Karina Giacomelli, who receives the original letters, her producers (especially) and/or the readers of the newspaper. This way, it would be possible for us to have a wider vision and conduct an approach about the changes done to the texts.

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