

The signification in Portuguese as a Foreign Language  
classroom: a proposal for the didactic teaching of semantic  
knowledge /  
*A significação na sala de aula de PLE: uma proposta para a  
didatização de conhecimentos semânticos*


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**ABSTRACT:**

It is known that the teaching of Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PLE) is still very focused on the display of linguistic forms and grammatical rules, and that this focus ends up disregarding the social use of the language (cf. Dell'Isola et al, 2003). For this reason we aim to defend the intersection of the field of Semantics in the context of the PLE classroom, arguing that the teaching of PLE needs a didactic approach of semantic knowledge, given that this perspective promotes the critical use of language. This approach is supported by exams such as the Certificado de Proficiência em Língua Portuguesa para Estrangeiros (Celpe-bras), which seeks to assess the candidate through real uses of the language, and not by manipulating grammatical forms (Brasil, 2020; Brasil, 2021). As a methodology, we make a bibliographical research, for later descriptive analysis that will culminate in the proposal of an exercise that, we hope, will help the student in the interpretation of an Elemento Provocador (EP), material presented in the oral part of the Celpe-bras test. From a theoretical point, we will use Ferraz e Costa (2021), Dell'Isola et al (2003), Antunes (2012), Oliveira (2008), Moura (2006), Ilari (2001) e Ullman (1964). As a result, it is observed that the reading of the EP texts evokes, even if implicitly, a dialogue between the communicative approach and the understanding of linguistic aspects in which the scope of signification acts decisively.

**KEYWORDS:** Semantics; PLE; Celpe-bras.

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## RESUMO

Sabe-se que o ensino de Português como Língua Estrangeira (PLE) ainda é muito voltado à apresentação de formas e regras, e que este foco acaba por desconsiderar o uso social da língua (cf. Dell'Isola et al, 2003). É com esse entendimento que, neste artigo, procuramos defender a intersecção do campo da semântica no contexto da sala de aula de PLE, argumentando que o ensino de português para falantes estrangeiros precisa passar pela didatização de conhecimentos semânticos, haja vista tal perspectiva promover o uso reflexivo da língua. Essa abordagem encontra respaldo em exames como o Certificado de Proficiência em Língua Portuguesa para Estrangeiros (Celpe-bras), que busca avaliar o candidato através de usos reais da língua, e não pela manipulação de formas gramaticais (Brasil, 2020; Brasil, 2021). Assume-se como hipótese de que quanto maior o domínio dessas habilidades, maior o nível de proficiência na língua. Como metodologia, apresentamos uma pesquisa bibliográfica, seguida de análise descritiva que culmina com uma produção autêntica a partir da proposta de um exercício que, esperamos, auxiliará o estudante na interpretação de um Elemento Provocador (EP), material apresentado na parte oral da prova Celpe-bras. Do ponto de vista teórico, utilizaremos como base Ferraz e Costa (2021), Dell'Isola et al (2003), Antunes (2012), Oliveira (2008), Moura (2006), Ilari (2001) e Ullman (1964). Como resultados, observa-se que a leitura dos textos dos EP evoca, ainda que implicitamente, uma interlocução entre a abordagem comunicativa e a compreensão de aspectos linguísticos no qual o âmbito da significação atua decisivamente.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Semântica; PLE; Celpe-bras.

## 1 Teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language, the Celpe-bras Exam, and lexical semantics

Currently, the teaching of Portuguese as a native language in Brazil is excessively focused on metalanguage, being taught as an end in itself, following a tradition that the linguist Carlos Alberto Faraco (2006, p. 25) will call "gramatiquice". Unfortunately, the paradigm in the Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PLE) classroom is not much different: the reality is that we have a linguistic education that values form. As a consequence, the applied methodology focuses on exercises to fix rules and manipulate forms, causing a neglect of the social dimension of language (cf. Dell'Isola et al, 2003).

Continuing in this same perspective, it is worth reflecting on what Gonçalves (2020) considers:

For decades, from the translation method of the forties to the audio-lingual method of the seventies, the structural perspective dominated in foreign language teaching. Grammar was the focus of study and learning; it was "the method," that is, teaching or learning grammar was equivalent to teaching or learning a foreign language. The problem with this approach was that, after years of learning, students demonstrated very low levels of communicative competence. It was quite common for students to say, "I understand, but I can't say a word," which illustrates well how grammatical knowledge did not translate into knowledge of the pragmatics of the language. Knowledge of grammar remains important for understanding a language, but *exclusive focus on it*

*hampers student's ability to convey meaning and infer meanings from verbal clues (Gonçalves, 2020, p. 125, our emphasis and translation)<sup>1</sup>.*

Thus, the author emphasizes that teaching grammar, providing the student with a metalanguage vocabulary, is not enough to make them learn a language. Grammar is an important element for language teaching; it constitutes a descriptive tool that can assist the speaker in their effective uses. However, one must not lose sight of its dimension: grammar needs to be in the classroom, as mentioned earlier, in the form of a tool, and not as the finished representation of a language.

However, in the hope of breaking with this framework, we can envision a change due to the influence caused by the examination for obtaining the Certificate of Proficiency in Portuguese as a Foreign Language, henceforth Celpe-bras. This is an exam applied to foreigners who wish/need to attest to their proficiency level in Brazilian Portuguese, being the only one of its kind recognized by the government of Brazil, thus making its impact on PLE teaching inevitable.

When we talk about impact, we are referring to the retroactive effect that "[...] can be defined as the influence or impact that an exam has on the teaching and learning process" (Avelar apud Almeida, 2020, p. 33-34)<sup>2</sup>. That is, like a two-way street, Portuguese teaching molds to the demands and criteria of Celpe-bras, while the exam is attentive to the reality presented in the classrooms. Celpe-Bras, therefore, acts in a way that guides "[...] teaching-learning practices, the development of teaching materials and resources, and the training of PLE teachers" (Brasil, 2020, p. 22)<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore, thanks to the phenomenon of retroactive effect, Celpe-bras exerts an influence on teaching that can be translated as a break from the structural perspective paradigm. This

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1 "Durante décadas, desde o método de tradução dos anos quarenta ao áudio-lingual dos anos setenta, a perspectiva estrutural dominou no ensino de línguas estrangeiras. A gramática era o centro do estudo e aprendizado, era "o método", ou seja, ensinar ou aprender gramática era equivalente a ensinar ou aprender uma língua estrangeira. O problema com esta abordagem foi que, passados anos de aprendizado, os alunos demonstravam níveis muito baixos de competência comunicativa. Era bastante comum os alunos dizerem "entendo, mas não sei dizer uma palavra", o que ilustra bem o quanto a competência em termos de conhecimento gramatical não se traduzia em conhecimento da pragmática da língua. O conhecimento da gramática não deixa de ser importante para entender uma língua, mas o foco exclusivo nela prejudica a habilidade dos alunos de transmitir significado e inferir significados a partir de indícios verbais" (Gonçalves, 2020, p. 125, original quote).

2 "[...] pode ser definido como a influência ou impacto que um exame exerce sobre o processo de ensino e de aprendizagem" (Avelar apud Almeida, 2020, p. 33-34, original quote).

3 "[...] as práticas de ensino-aprendizagem, de elaboração de materiais e recursos didáticos e de formação de professores de PLE" (Brasil, 2020, p. 22, original quote).

happens because the exam makes language understood as a communicative event, as its tests are designed with the objective of

"[...] proposing parameters for teaching that would focus on language use opportunities, aiming at the participation of students in different communication situations in which Portuguese would be the language of socialization among participants" (Schlatter apud Brasil, 2020, p. 26).<sup>4</sup>

In this sense, considering this stance on language, this paper understands that "[...] reading is a process that involves the combination of textual information and the information that the reader brings to the text, it is expected that there will be a kind of "dialogue" between text and reader" (Dell'Isola et al, 2003, p. 160)<sup>5</sup>, and this dialogue evokes different types of knowledge, among them lexical, syntactic, and semantic knowledge (cf. Dell'Isola et al, 2003, p. 159). It is verified that such parameters are present in Celpe-bras through the choice of materials presented, such as the Provocative Elements (EPs), texts addressed in a stage of the exam that will be discussed later in this paper.

Therefore, when teaching a new language to a foreign speaker, the teacher should aim for the student to attain proficiency, meaning the ability to express themselves in the target language. To achieve this, strategies that adapt the student's understanding to various communicative situations should be part of the teaching-learning process. This approach enables the student to act with independence, skill, and linguistic-discursive propriety. This understanding of proficiency, it is worth noting, corroborates with the perspective adopted by Celpe-bras which affirms: "[...] understand proficiency as the learner's ability to use the language appropriately to perform actions in the world, in different contexts, and always with a social purpose" (Brasil, 2020, p. 29)<sup>6</sup>.

Based on the above, the classroom needs to become a space of communicative emphasis, because, as defended in the constructs of Celpe-bras, what is sought to attest to proficiency in a language is the speaker's ability to use it in communication situations that resemble real life (Almeida, 2020).

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4 "[...] propor parâmetros para um ensino que se voltasse para oportunidades de uso da língua, visando à participação dos educandos em diferentes situações de comunicação em que o português fosse a língua de socialização entre os participantes" (Schlatter apud Brasil, 2020, p. 26, original quote).

5 "[...] ler é um processo que envolve a combinação entre a informação textual e a informação que o leitor traz para o texto, espera-se que haja uma espécie de "diálogo" entre texto e leitor" (Dell'Isola et al, 2003, p. 160, original quote)

6 "[...] compreender a proficiência como a capacidade do aprendiz de usar adequadamente a língua para desempenhar ações no mundo, em diferentes contextos, e sempre com um propósito social" (Brasil, 2020, p. 29, original quote).

Thus, if this is the goal, it is important to understand that words "[...] are the 'verbal means' of externalizing meanings" (Antunes, 2012, p. 22)<sup>7</sup>. In other words, natural languages, through their lexicon, are one of the vehicles through which we humans mobilize meanings, and this mobilization is characterized as the final objective of using a language: communication. If we adopt this stance, it is necessary that (in PLE teaching) semantic phenomena be explained, as the construction of the meaning of words is contextual and occurs through interaction between individuals. Therefore being volatile, not static, and not confined to the basic meanings found in dictionaries. This process always occurs in communicative situations that can expand the possibilities of meaning, depending on the context and interaction scenes, as Antunes (2012) tells us.

Also, Antunes (2012) emphasizes that every verbal interaction, whether written or oral, necessarily mobilizes the lexical repertoire of the language and our ability to select words that give us the opportunity to say what we want to say. Since we do not speak what we want to say, we speak what the words allow us to say. This reasoning, not always explicit, needs to be highlighted to the students. More than asking what the first meaning is, questioning why certain words have been used by an author, and what semantic possibilities motivated its use in a given linguistic-communicative context, are necessary aspects.

Further on, in the development of this paper, we will explain what Provocative Elements (EPs) are, material found in Celpe-bras. With a sample, we will be able to exemplify how the meaning of a word occurs contextually and the importance of explaining the phenomenon to contribute to the effectiveness of Portuguese learning by the foreign student. In the end, we propose an exercise that may help the student in understanding and interpreting the EP, and finally, we present our considerations on the topic discussed here, as well the references used in the production of this paper.

## **2 Semantic competence for reading a Provocative Element**

The Celpe-bras exam is structured in two parts: the Written Part and the Oral Part. In this work, we will focus on the Oral Part, in which the examinee is called upon to interact with an

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<sup>7</sup> "[...] são o 'meio verbal' de exteriorização dos sentidos" (Antunes, 2012, p. 22, original quote)

evaluator. One of the "characters" involved in this process is the Interlocutor Evaluator (AI), who seeks to "[...] simulate spoken language use practices similar to those the participant may experience in their daily life" (Brasil, 2020, p. 32)<sup>8</sup>. This face-to-face interaction is also accompanied by an Observer Evaluator (AO), who, as the name suggests, examines the examinee through observation of their interaction, aiming not to intervene during the conversation. It is at this stage of the exam that the Provocative Elements (EPs) are used, short materials that propose topics for interaction. The Base Document of the Celpe-bras exam defines:

The EPs presented to the participant during the second stage of the Oral Part of the Exam consist of short texts or excerpts from texts of different discursive genres (reports, news, pamphlets, advertisements, cartoons, comic strips, graphics, maps, etc.) that circulate or have circulated in Brazil, taken from different sources (newspapers, magazines, websites, books, etc.). The composition of the provocative elements is predominantly multimodal and represents the great diversity of genres that circulate socially. According to Júdice (2009), these multimodal genres are configured with the use of isolated images or in association with words and are likely to provide different possibilities of dialogues between the verbal and the non-verbal. Through the EPs, the aim is to contextualize a particular theme, presenting information and/or points of view with the potential to fuel interaction on a topic over five minutes (Brasil, 2020, p. 43)<sup>9</sup>.

Here it is possible to argue that the multimodal characteristic of the EPs evokes lexical and semantic knowledge parameters, as it is important for the examinee to understand how these parameters appear in different texts that respect the characteristics of the different genres in which they are inserted and how the verbal elements contribute to the reading of the non-verbal elements.

It is worth adding that some of the aspects that govern the oral evaluation of the exam take into consideration a more global analysis of the candidate's performance, an evaluative action carried out by the AI through the holistic grading scale<sup>10</sup>. In addition, there is a more specific

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8 "[...] simular práticas de uso da língua falada semelhantes àquelas que o participante poderá vivenciar em seu cotidiano" (Brasil, 2020, p. 32, original quote).

9 "Os EPs apresentados ao participante durante a segunda etapa da Parte Oral do Exame compreendem textos curtos ou recortes de textos de diferentes gêneros discursivos (reportagens, notícias, panfletos, propagandas, cartuns, tirinhas, gráficos, mapas etc.) que circulam ou circularam no Brasil, retirados de distintos suportes (jornais, revistas, sites, livros etc.). A composição dos elementos provocadores é predominantemente multimodal e representa a grande diversidade de gêneros que circulam socialmente. Conforme Júdice (2009), esses gêneros multimodais são configurados com recurso à imagem isolada ou em associação com a palavra e suscetíveis de proporcionar diferentes possibilidades de diálogos entre o verbal e o não-verbal. Por meio dos EPs, almeja-se contextualizar um determinado tema, apresentando informações e/ou pontos de vista com potencial para alimentar a interação sobre um assunto ao longo de cinco minutos" (Brasil, 2020, p. 43, original quote).

10 The holistic grading scale evaluates the candidate's overall performance. It is used by the Interlocutor Evaluator, as this evaluation must be conducted during the interaction/interview, which requires a more general analysis of the

analysis of this same performance during the interaction with the AI, an evaluative action carried out by the AO through the analytical grading scale<sup>11</sup>. Regarding this, the Base Document of the exam highlights the evaluated parameters:

Oral comprehension, conceived as an active and interactive process of *meaning production*;  
Interactional competence, understood as a joint social action between speakers [...] (in which) they consciously use (communicative strategies) to overcome *linguistic and/or pragmatic obstacles*;  
Fluency, understood as *the ability to express oneself* in a natural and spontaneous flow of speech;  
Lexical adequacy, referring to *the ability to adequately mobilize lexical resources, in function of the communicative objectives at stake in a given interaction relationship*;  
*Grammatical adequacy, concerning the ability to adequately mobilize grammatical resources, in function of the communicative objectives at stake in a given interaction relationship*;  
Pronunciation, referring to the ability to produce sounds for *meaning production*, which implies mastering not only segmental aspects but also suprasegmental aspects (particularly, stress, rhythm, intonation) (Brasil, 2020, p. 47-48, our emphasis)<sup>12</sup>.

With the highlighted italics indicated in the quote, in which we revisit the evaluation parameters of the Oral Part of the Celpe-bras, we intend to highlight the aspects that explicitly and/or implicitly denote the need to develop in the PLE student who will take the exam a given competence that we will call semantic competence, considering such parameters evoke the signification involved/present in each EP text applied in this evaluative stage. By signification, we assume the type of meaning that is intrinsic to the linguistic form, manifested through various

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communicative performance. For more information about the holistic grading scale, we suggest reading the Base Document of the Celpe-Bras Exam: Brasil, 2020, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> The analytic grading scale is used by the Observer Evaluator to perform a more detailed evaluation of the examinee's performance according to the parameters we mentioned in this paper. For more information about the analytic grading scale, we suggest reading the Base Document of the Celpe-Bras Exam: Brasil, 2020, p. 49-51.

<sup>12</sup> “compreensão oral, concebida como processo ativo e interativo de produção de sentidos;  
competência interacional, compreendida como uma ação social conjunta entre os falantes [...] (na qual) conscientemente lançam mão (de estratégias comunicativas) para superar impasses linguísticos e/ou pragmáticos;  
Fluência, entendida como a capacidade de expressão num fluxo natural e espontâneo de fala;  
Adequação lexical, referente à capacidade de mobilizar adequadamente recursos lexicais, em função dos objetivos comunicativos em jogo numa determinada relação de interlocução;  
Adequação gramatical, concernente à capacidade de mobilizar adequadamente recursos gramaticais, em função dos objetivos comunicativos em jogo numa determinada relação de interlocução;  
Pronúncia, referente à capacidade de produzir os sons para a produção de sentido, o que implica o domínio de aspectos não apenas segmentais, mas também suprasegmentais (em particular, acentuação, ritmo, entonação)” (Brasil, 2020, p. 47-48, original quote).

semantic phenomena as categorized in the theoretical perspectives of this field of investigation, and which result from the interaction between the linguistic form of an utterance and the context in which it is used. In this scenario, it is necessary to deal with the following paradigm alluded to by Oliveira (2008):

it can be said that a text has no meaning before it is read, if "meaning" is understood here as a meaning created by the reader. However, it cannot be extrapolated to affirm that the words that compose a text, placed there by its author, have no meaning before being read. It is in this extrapolation that the problem lies. After all, the words that compose a text have meaning even before the text is read; otherwise, the author would not have placed them in their text (Oliveira, 2008, p. 144-145)<sup>13</sup>.

Thus, mobilizing meanings (interpretation/comprehension) in interaction with the text (in the case of the Oral Part of the Celpe-bras exam, reading the EP) will allow the candidate to manifest signification (communication) as a result of their communicative performance.

To exemplify what we mean, we will analyze an EP used in the 2019.2 edition of the Celpe-bras (Fig. 1), which also includes the constituent part of the Interaction Script (RI), material provided to the AI with the aim of guiding and supporting the conversation that will be evaluated in the Oral Part of the exam. Regarding the RI, it reads that:

The questions contained in the interaction script, used by this evaluator, are a guide and should be asked in a way that simulates an authentic interaction, taking into consideration, for the formulation of the next question, the previous answers given by the participant (Brasil, 2020, p. 32)<sup>14</sup>.

This is an extremely important action: the guidance is that the oral interaction should not be characterized as a battery of interpretative questions. The RI is not a "reading sheet" to be vocalized, but a support; its function is to direct the interlocution so that the AI must use the questions in a way that imitates a real communicative situation.

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13 "[...] pode-se afirmar que um texto não tem sentido antes de ser lido, se "sentido" for entendido aqui como um sentido criado pelo leitor. Contudo, não se pode extrapolar e afirmar que as palavras que compõem um texto, nele colocadas pelo seu autor, não têm significado antes de serem lidas. É nessa extrapolação que reside o problema. Afinal, as palavras que compõem um texto possuem sentido antes mesmo de o texto ser lido; do contrário, o autor não as teria colocado em seu texto" (Oliveira, 2008, p. 144-145, original quote).

14 "As perguntas contidas no roteiro de interação, utilizado por esse avaliador, são um guia e devem ser feitas de maneira a simular uma interação autêntica, levando-se em consideração, para a formulação da próxima pergunta, as respostas prévias dadas pelo participante" (Brasil, 2020, p. 32, original quote).



It is worth noting that the Celpe-bras will not evaluate text interpretation, but it is necessary for the conversation:

The interaction of the Oral Part, in turn, evaluates oral comprehension and production. As the oral interaction develops through provocative elements, which are multimodal texts, reading is also involved, although it is not directly evaluated in this part of the Exam (Brasil, 2020, p. 33)<sup>15</sup>.

In other words, although reading is not exactly the focus of the Oral Part, what will actually be evaluated, it is necessary (see the question in Stage 2 of the script: What is the material about?), because the dialogue presupposes the interpretation of the provided text, which in turn, as we will show in the analysis, presupposes the understanding of semantic phenomena. Text interpretation is, therefore, at the core of the Celpe-bras proposal.

### 3 Analyzing a Provocative Element

In Fig. 1, we can observe that the creators of the Celpe-Bras exam chose a cartoon as one of the Provocative Elements (EPs). We understand that this choice is not accidental. According to Miranda (2013), a cartoon can be understood as a genre that closely resembles another genre, the caricature. However, it is possible to draw a not-so-explicit distinction between the two. A cartoon is known for its elements reminiscent of comic strips, and it is also characterized by its critique of human behavior. Through a drawing, with or without verbal elements, it satirizes, sometimes ironically, our habits and customs, making a judgment. Therefore, we believe that a genre like this is chosen as an EP for its ability to condense content, allowing multiple unfolding possibilities for interaction.

Therefore, the cartoon manages to convey a significant amount of information with a limited number of resources, and to do this, it employs not only visual resources but also the semantic possibilities provided by our language. Moreover, as it is a premise of the exam to revisit texts whose circulation and communicative motivations are real, the cartoon is an excellent example, given its wide dissemination in the Brazilian social scene, whether in physical media, such as

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15 “A interação da Parte Oral, por sua vez, avalia a compreensão e a produção orais. Como a interação oral se desenvolve mediante elementos provocadores, que são textos multimodais, a leitura também está envolvida, embora não seja diretamente avaliada nessa parte do Exame” (Brasil, 2020, p. 33, original quote).


newspapers and magazines, or in electronic media, such as websites and social networks, highlighting a communicative situation of everyday language use.

Figure 1: He died from bureaucracy

Interação Face a Face

EDIÇÃO 2019/2 Celpe Bras Morreu de burocracia Elemento Provocador 14 INEP

Elemento Provocador



MORREU DE BUROCRACIA.

Outras Informações

Morrer de (...) sentido figurado: sofrer, padecer, ex.: morrer de amor/saudade/tédio.  
Burocracia: sistema ou estrutura formada por órgãos públicos e seus funcionários que administram a coisa pública segundo uma rígida hierarquia de divisão de tarefas e regulamento fixo. *Uso pejorativo:* sistema visto como estrutura ineficiente, inoperante, morosa na solução de problemas e indiferente às questões das pessoas – o regulamento é o mais importante.

Diga ao examinando:

Etapa 1 Por favor, observe a imagem e leia o texto silenciosamente. (O participante faz isso silenciosamente)

Etapa 2 Após aproximadamente um minuto, diga ao participante: De que trata o material?

Etapa 3 Siga o Roteiro abaixo e faça as adequações necessárias em função das respostas do examinando.

1. Por que você acha que a personagem morreu soterrada por papéis?
2. O que você entende por burocracia?
3. É possível associar burocracia à demora?
4. A que você atribui a demora no atendimento das solicitações?
5. Há um lado bom e um lado ruim da burocracia? Dê exemplos.
6. Você gostaria de trabalhar em uma empresa privada ou em uma repartição pública? Por quê?
7. Você já viveu alguma situação em que se sentiu prejudicado pela burocracia? Relate.
8. Você considera que no seu país existe muita burocracia? Compare com o Brasil.

Source: INEP (2019, p. 18). Available on: <https://abrir.link/aNzqQ>.

To begin with, we draw attention once again to the dialogical process that is reading. “Every process of textual comprehension (whether oral or written texts) depends on two capacities: decoding and inferring” (Ferraz & Costa, 2021, p. 16)<sup>16</sup>. In decoding, the reader tries to understand what the author of the text meant through how they said it, that is, which words were used. And in inferring, the reader inserts into the text the information that is not present at a first level, the linguistic level, but that is indicated through it and through the context. Here we find ourselves facing a somewhat conflicting paradigm for linguistic studies. According to Moura (2006):

The boundary between semantics and pragmatics is typically drawn from the notion of context. Meaning that is independent of context is placed in the field of semantics, while contextually dependent meaning is placed in the field of pragmatics. The problem is that a precise definition of context is rarely provided, and the division between semantics and pragmatics remains very fluid [...]

<sup>16</sup> “Todo processo de compreensão textual (sejam textos orais ou escritos) depende de duas capacidades: a de decodificar e a de inferir” (Ferraz; Costa, 2021, p. 16, original quote).

when we analyze in detail the different contextual elements that affect language use, the first idea to fall apart is that every contextual factor is of a pragmatic nature. Meaning (constituted in the semantic component) can encompass different contextual elements (Moura, 2006, p. 66)<sup>17</sup>.

Although it is not the aim of this article to discuss the limits and/or boundaries between semantics and pragmatics, we argue that the teaching of knowledge inherent to semantics involves a broad and integrative analysis of these areas. Thus, in the dynamics of communication, the interpretation to be involved reflects what Oliveira (2008) suggested:

It is worth noting that meanings are not in the dictionary due to the inventiveness or *ad hoc* decision of the lexicographer. They result from conventions established by the linguistic community throughout its history, and can obviously be modified by the community itself over time (Oliveira, 2008, p. 147)<sup>18</sup>.

In linguistic interaction, for instance, when the candidate deals with the EP text to demonstrate their understanding of the referenced topic, a communicative scenario is established where a set of shared information between interlocutors, world knowledge, inferences, linguistic-discursive relations, beliefs, lexical-grammatical strategies are necessary to guide communication/interpretation. Due to this and the didactic intentions advocated here to address such knowledge in Portuguese as a Foreign Language classes, the analysis undertaken integrates semantics and pragmatics. The aim is to demonstrate that the reflective use of language paves the way to foster learning, which consequently results in a higher level of proficiency for the candidate in the exam.

Firstly, to start analyzing the EP, let's consider that upon encountering a character buried under piles of papers, a second character verbalizes: "He died from bureaucracy". An unwary reader might think of the first, basic, prototypical, dictionary sense of the verb 'died':

die 1 intr. to lose life, existence (any living being) [...] 1.1 intr. and pron. Pass away, decease, expire [...] 1.2 to lose life under certain conditions or

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17 "A fronteira entre semântica e pragmática é normalmente traçada a partir da noção de contexto. A significação que independe de contexto é colocada no campo da semântica, e a significação contextualmente dependente é colocada no campo da pragmática; o problema é que uma definição precisa de contexto raramente é fornecida, e a divisão entre semântica e pragmática continua muito fluida [...] ora [...] quando analisamos em detalhe os diferentes elementos contextuais que afetam o uso da linguagem, a primeira ideia a cair por terra é que todo fator contextual é de natureza pragmática. O sentido (constituído no componente semântico) pode abranger diferentes elementos contextuais" (Moura, 2006, p. 66, original quote).

18 "É bom ressaltar que os significados não estão no dicionário por causa da inventividade ou decisão *ad hoc* do lexicógrafo. Eles são o resultado das convenções estabelecidas pela comunidade linguística ao longo de sua história, podendo obviamente, ser modificados pela própria comunidade com o passar do tempo" (Oliveira, 2008, p. 147, original quote).

circumstances 2. Intr. to lose strength, vigor, freshness, brightness slowly, gradually; slacken 2.1 intr. to gradually lose strength; [...] disappear, vanish [...] 3 intr. to stop functioning (engine, mechanism, device, vehicle etc.) [...] (Houaiss; Villar, 2001, p. 1963)<sup>19</sup>.

Your interpretation, therefore, would be that the buried character had lost their life, deceased. However, this decoding does not seem to be the most appropriate. It does not take into consideration the characteristics of the cartoon genre: the humor present in the image is built upon an extension of the meaning of the word 'die', which many refer to as figurative sense. Regarding the phenomenon of language figuration, Ilari (2001, p. 108) states: "We use language figuratively whenever we seek a non-literal, unconventional interpretation for it"<sup>20</sup>. The author goes on to affirm that analogies, linguistic processes highlighting similarities between things, are useful tools for understanding figuration.

Regarding semantic extension, Ullman (1964, p. 415) suggests it as a process of "specialization of meaning [...] extremely common [and] [...] one of the main sources of polysemy"<sup>21</sup>. Thus, to talk about 'death' is to talk about the end of life; by extension, it is to talk about 'finality'. As for the meaning of 'bureaucracy', a similar movement in seeking its dictionary meaning could occur, being:

Bureaucracy n. 1. System of public activity execution, especially of administration, through a complex body of officials assigned to offices, secretariats, departments, etc., with well-defined positions, selected and trained based on technical and professional qualifications, guided by fixed regulations, specific routines, and a hierarchy with clearly demarcated lines of authority and responsibility, enjoying job stability. [...] 3. Pej. Such system or body of officials seen as inefficient, unproductive, slow in resolving issues, lacking initiative and flexibility, indifferent to people's needs and public opinion, tending to complicate procedures and expand its area of influence and power, thereby obstructing or suffocating the organizational functions that are its very reason for existence [...] (Houaiss; Villar, 2001, p. 532)<sup>22</sup>.

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19 "morrer 1 int. perder a vida, a existência (qualquer ser vivo) [...] 1.1 int. e pron. Finar-se, falecer, expirar [...] 1.2 perder a vida sob determinada condição ou circunstância 2. Int. perder a força, o vigor, o viço, o brilho de modo lento, gradual; afrouxar 2.1 int. perder gradualmente a força; [...] desaparecer, sumir [...] 3 int. parar de funcionar (motor, mecanismo, dispositivo, veículo etc.) [...]" (Houaiss; Villar, 2001, p. 1963, original quote).

20 "Usamos a linguagem figuradamente toda vez que buscamos para ela uma interpretação não-literal, não convencional" (Ilari, 2001, p.108, original quote).

21 "especialização do significado [...] extremamente comum [e] [...] uma das principais fontes de polissemia" (Ullman, 1964, p. 415, original quote).

22 "Burocracia s.f. 1 sistema de execução da atividade pública, esp. da administração, por meio de um corpo complexo de funcionários lotados em um órgão, secretarias, departamentos etc., com cargos bem definidos, selecionados e treinados com base em qualificações técnicas e profissionais, os quais se pautam por um regulamento fixo, determinada rotina e uma hierarquia com linhas de autoridade e responsabilidade bem demarcadas, gozando de

Based on the above and within the communicative scene evoked by the EP text, 'bureaucracy' is understood as a type of organization heavily criticized for being tedious, tiresome, and excessively rigid, sometimes defining structures that do not work. In the cartoon, the relationship that can be made is that 'bureaucracy' causes the malfunctioning of a system; it leads to the "death" of people because they do not succeed in what they seek to accomplish. 'Bureaucracy' is the cause ("he died *from* bureaucracy"), complement of the transitive verb. The analogy undertaken is realized in the parallel drawn between death/end. The meaning of 'death' as loss of vital forces (motivation) due to fatigue, or end of something/undertaking due to major reasons, in this context, inherits from the basic sense of the word its characteristic of describing something that has come to its end. It is noteworthy that the creators of the Celpe-bras exam seemed to understand the weight that the semantic phenomenon chained by the verb 'die' plays in understanding this EP, considering the need to write an information box below the image containing an explanation for the figurative sense that the word can assume when accompanied by the preposition "from".

Secondly, the examinee will need to recover the implicit meaning conveyed by the drawing. In this regard, it is worth reflecting on what Ilari (2001) proposes:

Linguistic messages sometimes contain implicatures that cannot be predicted based solely on their literal meaning. Crucial for the final interpretation of the message, these implicatures can only be discovered through conjecture based on a global assessment of the communicative situation, in which the listener seeks to recover the speaker's intentions. Messages that contain this type of implicature are always interpreted as "indirect" and typically compel the listener to ask: "What did he mean by that?", "What was he trying to get at?" etc. (Ilari, 2001, p. 92)<sup>23</sup>.

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estabilidade no emprego. [...] 3. Pej. Tal sistema ou tal corpo de funcionários enquanto estrutura ineficiente, inoperante, morosa na solução de questões, falta de iniciativa e de flexibilidade, indiferente às necessidades das pessoas e à opinião pública, tendente a complicar trâmites e a ampliar sua área de influência e seu poder, com consequente emperramento ou asfixia das funções organizacionais que são a sua razão mesma de ser [...]" (Houaiss; Villar, 2001, p. 532, original quote).

23 "As mensagens lingüísticas comportam às vezes implícitos que não podem ser previstos com base apenas no sentido literal. Importantíssimos para a interpretação final da mensagem, esses implícitos só podem ser descobertos por um trabalho de conjectura feito a partir de uma avaliação global da situação comunicativa, em que o ouvinte procura recuperar as intenções do falante. Mensagens que comportam esse tipo de implícito são sempre interpretadas como "indiretas" e obrigam, tipicamente, o ouvinte a perguntar: "O que foi que ele quis me dizer com isso?", "Aonde ele quis chegar?" etc." (Ilari, 2001, p. 92, original quote).

The criticism must be understood within the context of the drawing. The candidate needs to master a given prior, culture-based notion that, in Brazilian society, 'bureaucracy' refers to a type of inefficient organization, very present in people's daily lives, typically associated with the public sector. So much so that "the Brazilian way" can be understood as a strategy to circumvent the inoperative bureaucratic system, as Bispo et al (2008) indicate. Bureaucracy is so present in Brazilian society that it triggers cultural processes, known and named by its individuals. Therefore, what can be observed is the expectation for a speaker who is capable not only of decoding words but also of presupposing hidden information (because it is implicit), which is not linguistically expressed but revealed through the context. This phenomenon is called implicature, "[...] a pragmatic inference, as it necessarily depends on the conversational context" (Ferraz; Costa, 2021, p. 20)<sup>24</sup>.

There is an incompatibility in the scene represented in the cartoon. This arises from the association that 'die' and its complement 'bureaucracy' build. From a linguistic point of view, therefore, the text producer employs "a figure of speech similar to [metaphor and comparison], whose main function is to give expression to impetuous feelings, which is exaggeration, or <<hyperbole>>" (Ullman, 1964, p. 283)<sup>25</sup>. The author further states that:

[...] the same tendency for exaggeration is responsible for countless hyperbolic expressions in daily life: horrible, astonishing, terrible, tremendous, abysmal, unfathomable, deadly, and many more. The meaning of some of these words has been completely nullified by their emotional tone: to speak of a "tremendous success," "terrible welcome," or something "horribly graceful" is, in fact, a contradiction of terms (Ullman, 1964, p. 284)<sup>26</sup>.

The same seems to occur with the expression "He died from bureaucracy", an aspect that alludes to the very compositional nature of the cartoon genre: the improbability of this actually happening creates a break in expectation. In other words, an interpretation that infers that the subject indeed 'died from bureaucracy' seems incorrect when not considering that the text contains

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24 "[...] uma inferência pragmática, pois depende obrigatoriamente do contexto conversacional" (Ferraz; Costa, 2021, p. 20, original quote).

25 "uma figura de estilo semelhante [à metáfora e à comparação], cuja função principal é dar expressão a sentimentos impetuosos, é o exagero, ou <<hipérbole>>" (Ullman, 1964, p. 283, original quote)

26 "[...] a mesma tendência para o exagero é responsável por um número incontável de expressões hiperbólicas da vida diária: horrível, espantoso, terrível, tremendo, abissal, insondável, mortal, e muitos mais. O significado de algumas destas palavras foi completamente anulado pelo seu tom emocional: falar em um <<êxito tremendo>>, de umas <<boas-vindas terríveis>>, ou de qualquer coisa <<horivelmente graciosa>>, é de facto uma contradição dos termos (Ullman, 1964, p. 284, original quote).

a critique, which was hyperbolically updated in the communicative scene transposed into the cartoon. Such improbability of interpretation is associated with the phenomenon of implicature, characterized by the possibility of canceling certain resulting interpretations. For instance: "Both presuppositions and implicatures can be canceled, and this is inherent in the contextual nature of these inferences, so it is not possible to distinguish implicature and presupposition based on cancelability" (Moura, 2006, p. 54)<sup>27</sup>.

In this sense, considering an example that might occur in a communicative scene like an office, where one colleague says, "It's hot in here" and the other understands that "the window should be opened," this inference (implicature) relative to what was said by the first colleague is not necessarily correct. This information can be canceled, for example, if the conversation continues as follows:

Colleague 1: It's hot in here!

Colleague 2: Oh, let me open the window.

Colleague 1: No, man, why would you open the window?

Colleague 2: Because you said it was hot, I thought...

Colleague 1: No, I just want the happy hour to come soon so we can have that cold beer you owe me.

We stated that this semantic mechanism is constitutively linked to the cartoon text, shaping this genre compositionally, as it is grounded in the studies of Raskin (1985) on the semantic mechanisms of humor. According to this author:

*The object of the research is verbal humor. The purpose is to develop a formal semantic analysis in terms of which each joke-carrying text would be identified as possessing a certain semantic property such that the presence of this property would render any text humorous. The main hypothesis is that this humorous element is the result of a partial overlap of two (or more) different and in a sense opposite scripts which are all compatible (fully or partially) with the text carrying this element (Raskin, 1985, p. 325).*

In summary: it is inherently part of the interpretation of this cartoon to observe that two scripts are constructed: one pointing to the 'death' of the character, which was caused by 'bureaucracy', and another pointing to a critique of this given state of affairs, alluding to *the modus operandi* of bureaucracy within our Brazilian society, which is linguistically constructed through hyperbole.

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<sup>27</sup> "Tanto pressupostos quanto implicaturas podem ser cancelados, e isso é imanente ao caráter contextual dessas inferências, de modo que não se pode distinguir implicatura e pressuposto a partir da cancelabilidade" (Moura, 2006, p. 54, original quote).

That said, reformulating Ilari's (2001) questions, the examinee should seek to infer what the cartoonist meant, where they were aiming, and what their intention was. By not using the prototypical meaning of the word 'died', the first character could indicate only that the second character could not complete an administrative task. But the meaning of the text, the information conveyed, does not end there. The reader must have the skill to perceive that beyond a system, 'bureaucracy', in the Brazilian cultural context, is a word used to describe a flawed, inoperative organization. The 'death' would not be due to giving up, for example; its cause would be more closely related to inefficiency issues. This perception of the author's intention to convey a critique through the text can only occur through understanding the context in which the speech occurs. This context is supported, in the analyzed case, by the drawing — where we can see piles of papers (typical of administrative processes) — and by the culturally constructed meaning that the word "bureaucracy" evokes in the text.

Furthermore, if we observe the Interaction Script, we will notice that the conversation undertaken by the evaluator will be closely linked to the reading of the EP, which involves understanding the semantic phenomena triggered by the use of the words selected by the text's author. Specifically, the information box describes not only the expression "died from" presenting its figurative meaning, but also shows an entry for the word "bureaucracy", highlighting its pejorative sense. Additionally, when reading questions from the EP such as:

"Why do you think the character died buried by papers?"

"What do you understand by bureaucracy?"

"Is it possible to associate bureaucracy with delays?"

"Would you like to work in a private company or a public office? Why?"

we more explicitly understand the role that the EP will play in the interaction, guiding the communication between the interlocutors as intended by the exam creators. We reiterate that these questions do not aim to evaluate, discover, or understand the examinee's reading of the cartoon. However, it is notable that the questions can only be answered through a prior interpretation of the text. Despite being thematic, they constantly refer back to the EP, which introduces the subject and serves as a basis for the content to be addressed in the interaction. Therefore, proficiency in the Oral Part is tested not only by the individual's ability to engage in a communicative event but also by their skill in mobilizing the meanings grasped from the text, in this case, the cartoon.





1. What is death?
2. What is a bureaucratic process to you?
3. What was the cause of the character's death?
4. Can we say that the character under the piles of paper truly died?
5. How do you think someone can die from bureaucracy?
6. What is the meaning of the word "died" in the cartoon?
7. What can we learn about bureaucracy after reading the cartoon?

Source: the authors, 2024.

Questions 1 to 2 aim to bring out the student's world knowledge. They should reflect on the meaning of 'death' and 'bureaucracy'. The expectation is that during the answers, the students will initially activate the basic meanings of these two lexical items, which at first do not seem to relate to each other. As a suggestion, a dictionary can be consulted by the class with the teacher's mediation.

Questions 3 to 4 provoke reflection on the meaning of the verb 'to die'. It is expected that the students will discover, through the use in the cartoon, that the word can take on different meanings, varying according to the context. It is at this point that the student can realize that the word was used in its figurative sense, that is, there was an extension of meaning that allows a double interpretation of the cartoon. To build the humor of the piece, the author allows two scenarios to coexist: the character may have indeed died, or 'to die' here is a hyperbole for being tired of bureaucracy.

Questions 5 to 6 are posed understanding that the students have already reflected on the necessary elements to consider the meaning of the word 'to die' and its figurative sense. Thus, at this stage, the aim is to relate the verb to its complement. The intention is to make the student realize how 'bureaucracy' is characterizing the act of dying and how the two related processes construct the cartoon's criticism.

Question 7 is intended to recap the entire reflection developed to ascertain what meaning can be grasped in understanding what a bureaucratic process is, how it can be related to the basic meaning of death. What does "dying of bureaucracy" say about 'bureaucracy'? And how can this verb be used in the context presented by the cartoon?

We emphasize that the proposed guide in no way seeks to rewrite or edit the Interaction Script. The sequence of questions does not follow the model of questions asked in the Oral Part of Celpe-Bras. In this sense, it is worth noting that the material proposed here has didactic and not

evaluative purposes. We aim to guide the student in interpreting the Provocative Element (EP); the questionnaire developed is a preliminary activity to the oral interaction, a reading exercise, given the purpose of promoting this necessary reflection for interpretation. Therefore, the proposal mentioned here, with adaptations to the teaching context, can be used, for example, in preparatory course classes for the Celpe-Bras exam, demonstrating the importance of reading (including that which mobilizes linguistic knowledge, more specifically, semantic-pragmatic) for the interpretation of a text.

### Final considerations

In summary, we advocate for teaching that is not solely based on metalinguistic concepts but brings the classroom closer to the real uses of the language. In this regard, we utilize the communicative approach of the Celpe-Bras exam to support our viewpoint. We believe that this perspective presupposes working with issues related to the knowledge of semantic questions/phenomena. For this reason, we propose their didactic application through the analysis of a Provocative Element (EP). We emphasize that the goal is not to replace grammatical language with a language based on studies of meaning but to provide a contribution to the teaching practice that takes this dimension of language into account. Finally, we hope this text can reach diverse classrooms and collaborate with the professional practice of our peers, always aiming for the ultimate goal we all share as teachers: the success of our students.

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