

Context under the bias of Sociocognition in Portuguese Language textbooks /

Contexto sob o viés da Sociocognição em livros didáticos de Língua Portuguesa

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ABSTRACT

Based on the theoretical assumptions of Sociocognition, context is a (re)elaborated construction between the participants of an interaction based on various elements in a specific social situation that the interlocutors consider relevant for the understanding and production of discourses (VAN DIJK, 2012). Based on this, the general objective of the article is to investigate the relationship that is established between context and understanding in the opening sections of the thematic units of Portuguese Language textbooks for Elementary School final years. Specifically, we intend to list the context models activated by the authors of the textbooks through the work carried out in the opening section of the units, in order to understand the discourse(s) that these works reveal to students on the subject of adolescents. As a methodology, we analyzed the collection *Vontade de Saber Português* approved by the PNLD (2014). The general results led us to consider that the analyzed collection sought to adopt strategies that tried to put an active reader on the scene in the comprehension process. Such strategies indicated the intrinsic relationship between the activated context models and the process of discursive understanding about the theme worked in the unit.

KEYWORDS: Context; Textbook; Sociocognition.

RESUMO

Tomando por base os pressupostos teóricos da Sociocognição, contexto constitui-se em uma construção (re)elaborada entre os participantes de uma interação a partir de variados elementos em uma situação social específica que os interlocutores tomam como relevantes para a compreensão e produção de discursos (VAN DIJK, 2012). A partir disso, o artigo tem por objetivo geral averiguar a relação que se estabelece entre contexto e compreensão nas seções de abertura das unidades temáticas dos livros didáticos de Língua Portuguesa de Ensino Fundamental anos finais. Especificamente, pretendemos elencar os modelos de contexto ativados pelos autores dos livros didáticos através do trabalho realizado na seção de abertura das unidades, com o intuito de entender o(s) discurso(s) que essas obras revelam para os alunos sobre o tema adolescentes. Como metodologia, analisamos a coleção *Vontade de Saber Português* aprovada pelo PNLD (2014). Os resultados gerais levaram-nos a considerar que a coleção analisada procurou adotar estratégias que tentassem colocar em cena um leitor ativo no processo de compreensão. Tais estratégias indicaram a relação intrínseca existente entre os modelos de contexto ativados e o processo de compreensão discursiva acerca da temática trabalhada na unidade.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Contexto; Livro didático; Sociocognição.*

1 Introduction

The concept of context stirs an increasing interest for investigations in many areas, such as Literature, Arts and Semiotics, Discourse Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis, Sociology, Ethnography and Anthropology, Psychology and many other study fields of Linguistics (VAN DIJK, 2012). Each one of these fields of study may have a different approach and point of view for studying the concept, and this fact enables it to be defined and characterized in many ways.

Considering the theoretical framework of Social Cognition, we have adopted the concept that context is a (re) produced construction between the participants of any interaction taking into account many elements of a certain social situation that the interlocutors find to be relevant to the comprehension and production of discourse (VAN DIJK, 2012). Sharing this approach, Falcone (2012) highlights that the interlocutor's (inter)subjective proprieties, their shared knowledge and how they make sense of contextual aspects will be a fundamental item to the comprehension of discourses, as well as to control the discourse production.

To Van Dijk (2012), context is considered a mental model; in fact, it is constituted as a special type within these models, named context models. They are defined as a "mental base" for production, reception and comprehension of discourses (VAN DIJK, 2001, p. 75). To produce a discourse about an event, for instance, the speakers firstly activate (or update) a mental model about such event, that is, what they know about it, their opinions, who are the participants involved in this event, what are this event's rules, etc. What will contribute to the activation of this model is what the participants find to be important about it (the event). Once this context model is produced, they start the production of their discourses.

These definitions show the importance of context to the processes of production and comprehension of texts and discourses. Considering the last aspect, Marcuschi (2008) emphasizes the idea that, in order to comprehend a linguistic expression or any text in use, it is essential to understand it within its contexts. Thus, in order to develop possibilities of textual comprehension, it is necessary that the reader, speaker or hearer, not only takes into consideration the textual information, but also the context of a certain social situation.

In light of these information, we have questioned ourselves: the activities and information presented in the opening sections of thematic units in schoolbooks for Portuguese learners in Elementary School enable the activation of which context models, and thus, which discourses' comprehension can be deduced from the topics that are explored by these units?

Considering this inquiry, our general objective in this article is to investigate the relationship that is established between context and comprehension in the thematic units of schoolbooks' opening sections that are used for teaching Portuguese in Elementary Education. More specifically, we intend to list the context models that are activated by the authors of these schoolbooks through what is presented in the opening section of the units, with the objective of understanding the discourse(s) that these books disclose for the students when it comes to the general topic of adolescence.

Regarding this specific objective, even though the context models are not observable, we have sought to investigate the possible context models that are activated by the authors of these schoolbooks, for we have used Van Dijk's (2008) considerations, when the author states that "discourse may be taken as one of the ways contexts are made visible through expression or manifestation" (p. 131). As we have aforementioned, if contexts are constituted in context models, it is possible to state that through the discourses that are materialized in texts, these models can become more evident. Making them "visible", as the author states, we understand that they can be analyzed, and thus listed.

In addition to this argument, Van Dijk (2008) mentions that they also present the characteristic of structuring and controlling "how things are said in the current situation" and thus determining the common knowledge and the information about event models (experiences), as well as the variable structures of sound production or graphical inscription, the syntax, the lexical selection and more often than not the style, register and rhetoric (p. 101). Considering this, it is possible to infer that the context models that motivate production and comprehension of discourses/texts prompted by the schoolbooks can possibly be "visible" using the following categories: selection of teaching objects, thematic units, texts that integrate reading activities, type of expected reader of the activities, contextualization elements, questions' instructions, etc.

Thus, we believe that analyzing the possible context models using constructed categories will give us support to understand what do the discourses in Elementary Education schoolbooks reveal for the student/reader concerning the following thematic: adolescence. We are aware that many other thematics are covered by these collections and are as relevant as the one that was

chosen to be analyzed here, however, considering methodological issues, we have selected one thematic to be analyzed and exposed in this article. It is relevant to highlight that our focus is not to investigate the identity constructions of the teenagers that use these schoolbooks, but to analyze the relationships between context models and comprehension, as well as to understand the influence of this relationship in the process of comprehension of these students/readers and the discourses that will be conveyed in the schoolbooks of Elementary School considering these thematics.

This article is thus organized: firstly, some studies about context that have already been conducted are presented; then, we present an explanation on how Social Cognition approaches the concept of context considering Van Dijk investigations about context models; subsequently our analyses are exposed; and then the final remarks are presented.

2 Studies about context

Van Dijk (2012) states that in many disciplinary fields, as well as different areas of Linguistics studies, the topic "context" has been presented with different senses and with slightly different implications. However, the author explains that, in general, these fields' publications do not present, in fact, deepened studies about the theory of context.

Since the 1980's, most of Van Dijk's works have concerned sociocognitive issues, as the author began to address the "representation of knowledge in memory, and more particularly, the role of cognitive models in the maintenance, elaboration and modification of knowledge and language social practices" (KOCH; BENTES; MORATO, 2011, p. 80). This concern allowed the author to develop a more solid study about the theory of context, deepening into this topic's studies and presenting us with a rich investigation about its conception.

Van Dijk (2008) states that it is hard to defend, in a more or less satisfactory manner, a notion of context. And it is possible for us to use it "whenever we want to indicate that some phenomenon, event, action or discourse needs to be seen or studied in relationship to its environment, that is, its 'surrounding' conditions and consequences. (p. 4, authors' emphasis). Thus, as we come across occurrences of any phenomenon proprieties', not only we ought to describe it, but we also explain it by relating some aspects of its context.

The author states that some studies of Cognitive Psychology about textual processing have provided some ideas as to what could be named as "cognitive context of discourse". From this

point on, the interest in the role played by context in processing discourse has began to gain more space in discussions. However, differently from what Van Dijk developed, such studies, with rare exceptions, were based on the idea that context was associated to a socially isolated mind (VAN DIJK; KINTSCH apud VAN DIJK, 2008).

It was only at the end of 1970's and beginning of 1980's that the development of studies concerning discursive and interactional approaches began. The structures of discourse were then more systematically studied in their social, historical and cultural context. However, in summary, such analyses have "limited such a context to the verbal context or co-text [...] for units of language or language use". (VAN DIJK, 2008, p. 23).

This approach was possibly influenced by the first research projects in Text Linguistics, that were based on a transphrastic analysis perspective and considered context as the textual surroundings. This enabled context to be limited to words, sentences and segments of the text. That is, it could only be understood through grammar and textual structures. Afterwards, the concept began to "include the immediate communicative situation, and only after a while, it began to include the social-cultural communicative situations as social-political-cultural cognitive surroundings" (KOCH; BENTES; MORATO, 2011, p. 80). From this point forward, considerations about how the context (that is, the social, historical, cultural, political, etc., social surroundings), would interact with the text began to gain more space in linguistics discussions.

Currently, as Van Dijk (2008) highlights, many studies have demonstrated that context is a crucial point to comprehend complex phenomena that occur in our everyday life, however these investigations do not clearly expose the concept of context they are referring to. The author states that, due to the fact that theory concerning this topic is complex, such as text and discourse theories, it needs to be elaborated and thus reflected in many disciplinary fields of humanities and social sciences. Thus, the author seeks to thoroughly define what context would mean in language, cognition, society and culture. The main aspect of this approach is to show that the concept of context exceeds some parameters that have been commonly used by some classic theories to define it.

These theories are, for instance, based on functional paradigms – on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). According to the author (2008, p. 29-30), "the limitations" that these theories present to the concept of context are due to their more "general approach to language and discourse" [...]. They can be summarized as, for instance: "too much linguistic sentence grammar;

too few autonomous discourse-theoretical notions; anti-mentalism; a lack of interest in cognition; too much esoteric vocabulary; and too little theoretical dynamism, development and self-criticism".

Although presenting such characteristics, SFL, as the author states, has offered expressive contributions to language and discourse studies. However, since it lacks an approach that favors cognition, it was not able to offer a functional theory, "using an explanatory functional theory of language use and discourse". (VAN DIJK, 2008, p. 30). Thus, context for authors such as Malinowski (1956, apud VAN DIJK, 2008), Firth (1968, apud VAN DIJK, 2008) and Halliday (1978, apud VAN DIJK, 2008), was essentially treated as a context of situation. Hence, its description was restricted to acts and events that could be observable and objective. This disregarded the mental processes, since they could not be visible. Halliday, based on Firth and Malinowski, has attributed context with the following properties: "Language is used, and must be studied, in relation to its social environment; Contexts only feature *relevant* aspects of situations; and Contexts are learned as general and abstract *types of situation*." (VAN DIJK, 2008, p. 38, author's emphasis).

In order to show that the concept of context exceeded some of these perspectives, which presented discourse as being directly influenced by social surroundings, for example, social class, age, geographical situations, historical knowledge, etc., Van Dijk seeks to adopt a sociocognitive approach, which is the base of the author's theory, and also of his point of view concerning the topic "context". Before we more thoroughly address the influence that Social Cognition had on this topic's approach, it is important, in order to contextualize the readers of this article, to make a few considerations about this field of study that proposed a new perspective to cognitive studies. On the next section, more discussions concerning this approach will be presented.

3 Social Cognition: a turn in cognitive studies

Social cognition begins to gain more space in discussions within Psychology, Cognition and Linguistics as cognitive activities start to be regarded as phenomena that are constituted in social interaction. One of the greatest scholars that dedicated himself to study the interaction that individuals establish with their surroundings and their social life, and that defended its importance to cognitive development, was the Belarusian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. He was theoretically opposed to the Swiss biologist Jean Piaget, because Vygotsky dedicated himself to study the evolution of knowledge construction capacity by human beings, and in his contributions, the internal processes that would contribute to the development of the individual were given more importance

than the interpersonal processes, that is, the ones that included the individual's relationship with society.

Vygotsky (1980, p. 60) – based on a dialectical relationship that was established between human beings and society ("admitting the influence of nature on man [...], man, in turn, affects nature and creates, through his changes in nature new natural conditions for his existence") – conceives that the evolution of psychological processes, that is, the individual's mental structures, were related to their interactions with the real world, with the social world. Human beings were thus defined as social individuals, being inserted in social relationships that would aggregate them.

These reflections' importance instigates a new way of reflecting about cognition, for social and cultural issues are considered as a cornerstone in the development of the individual's activities. Thus, the individuals' interaction with their surroundings, from interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, is considered as a central aspect for the process of knowledge construction, as well as for their own constitution as a human being in the world.

George Lakoff's contributions, initially with the work "*Women, fire and dangerous things*", will also influence on how reflections in a cognitive perspective are conducted. These reflections will contribute to the beginning of a linguistic theory in the mid-1980s., known as Cognitive Linguistics (CL). Lakoff begins to theorize about the idea that the meaning of things in our world is constructed from human beings' sensory interaction with their world ("embodied mind"). The notion that cognitive competences were exclusively happening within the individuals without considering their interaction with their surroundings, and that mind and body were two dichotomous entities, begins to be reconsidered.

Classical cognitive sciences presented the objective to expose the difference between cognitive processes that happened in and out of the individual's minds. The researchers tried to explain how the individuals' knowledges were structured in their minds and how they were triggered to solve problems presented by their environment (KOCH; CUNHA-LIMA, 2005, p. 278). Considering this, the social-cultural surrounding had no value for the development of cognitive processes. It was considered merely as an element that could be internally represented within the individual's mind and as "a source of information for the individual mind" (KOCH; CUNHA-LIMA, 2005, p. 278).

After the proposition of these initial notions, cognitive science begins to propose new reflections that considered the mental representation not only as a separated element from the outer world, with no relation whatsoever with it, but presenting "[...] the concept that mental

representations are part of the world and emerge from the body" (KOCH; BENTES; MORATO, 2011, p. 18). This new paradigm proposed the idea of an embodied perspective of cognition, that is, that the mind is embodied. Namely, the objectivism in the relationship between language and world is replaced with an experientialism, allowing the individual, or the "cognoscente being", to be considered as an entire being, that when interacting with the world, is composed of a brain, mind and body. In this interaction, according to the authors, there is the development of a complementary relationship between human being and world, for they integrate themselves and are also mutually modifying themselves. In our point of view, this aspect will influence the notion of context, since, – when regarded as a cognitive process – the context models are updated depending on the interaction and communicative situation.

Considering reflections and discussions about this existing separation between internal and external, as well as mental and social in cognitive processes, new perspectives and studies have started to gain more space in investigations about human cognition. Such studies have revisited the fundamentals about cognition as a merely mental aspect, and began to consider social issues as a fundamental element in the development of cognitive processes. This new perspective stated that "many cognitive processes took place in society" (KOCH; CUNHA-LIMA, 2005, p. 279). That is, many aspects of cognition were not limited to the individual's mind, as classical studies have firstly stated, but were also present in social issues.

Thus, the embodied mind point of view casts aside the idea that the brain ought to be considered as an independent place of a body and distant from the world, or as Koch, Bentes and Morato (2011) state, the idea of seeing the brain as an "autonomous locus of cognition" (p. 18). This influenced the cognitive activities, that began to be considered as "intrinsically linked to the embodied action, and thus resulting from the types of experiences lived by the organism through their sensory-motor capacities embodied into a wider biological, psychological and socio-cultural context" (KOCH; BENTES; MORATO, 2011, p. 18).

Hence, considering this relationship between mind and body, cognitive science began to dedicate to understand and explain possible relationships between cognition and language, as well as to reflect upon models that would be able to encompass this relationship between them. Thus, investigations and explanations about cognitive models covering the many capacities of the human mind began to be proposed.

Concerning language, cognitive studies have begun to emphasize that it was constituted as one of human's cognitive manifestations, linked to other cognitive capacities, and that it was

used for many purposes. And this proposition allowed language to be no longer considered as an innate and autonomous aspect concerning the other cognitive systems. That is, language began to be regarded not as presenting an independent existence, but existing in the individual's experience with the world. As language is comprehended as a cognitive process that exists in the world and affects society, it enables the studies about context, initially considered as external to language, to be re-visited and elaborated under a new point of view: the sociocognitive perspective.

Therefore, we have selected this point of view to guide our discussions about the relationship between context and comprehension in our research. In this perspective, context will be considered as a specific type of mental model that is stored in our memory: the context models. As will be presented subsequently, these elements will contribute to the process of discourse comprehension.

4 The concept of context as considered by Social Cognition

New theoretical reflections about society and cognition have started to influence studies about what was understood as context and the emphasis that was given to it in the cognitive processing. As social issues became an important element for the understanding of cognition, context aspects are also regarded as fundamental for human cognition. And as a consequence of this – that is, the idea that cognition is constituted in interaction – the studies about interaction, comprehension and inferences begin to consider the concept of context under a new point of view, the sociocognitive perspective.

Considering the relationship between society and cognition, social cognition is established as an important field of study regarding approaches and definitions of context, for according to Van Dijk (2001), social and communicative situations may not directly influence verbal and discursive structures. That is, there is not an objective relationship between society and discourse. Social and communicative situations will not interfere in the process of discursive production and comprehension. Actually, the mental representations of each speaker and hearer will be deemed as fundamental aspects in the production and comprehension of discourse. These representations depend on speakers' and hearers' experiences concerning their social and communicative situations.

Koch and Elias (2013), even though not directly mentioning the mental representations aspects that Van Dijk seeks to highlight when studying context, also consider the importance of

taking into account, when approaching this thematic, the previous experiences that the speakers present. The authors state that each individual, when participating in any interaction, brings a "cognitive baggage", which is constituted within itself by the very context. This context, according to the authors, corresponds to the following interlocutors' knowledge: encyclopedic, social-interactive, procedural, textual, etc.

In order for individuals to comprehend each other, these contexts need to be partially shared, since the senses of a text, either in an oral or written communicative situation, are never fully complete. As the authors state, "the sense of a text does not exist *a priori*, but is constructed in the interaction individual-text. Thus, in/for sense production, it is necessary to take into account the context" (p. 57).

This new point of view considers that context involves the internal elements of the text, the relevant aspects for the communicative situations and the external aspects of the text (encyclopedic, social-interactive, historical, cultural and shared knowledge, etc.), that are processed in memory to make sense of a situation and to be comprehended. (KOCH; CUNHA-LIMA, 2005).

This perspective highlights that taking into account the sociocognitive context when conducting a textual analysis shows us that, beyond of focusing on the explicit linguistic utterance alone, cognitive elements are considered as highly active in language production and in the dynamicity of each new situation as well as in communicative and interactive actions.

Focused on this theoretical assumption and knowing that sense is not on the text, its producer – supposing their interlocutor already presents knowledge about their expression objectives, that is, supposing what the reader/hearer is capable of retrieving information through inferences – leaves many implicit information in the text. Then, the producer is not redundant in his/her production and does not need to expose unnecessary information. Not explaining every information in the text allows that inferences be made in a multiple way and enables a single text to present many readings.

In order for text producers to cope with what they supposedly have as shared knowledge with their recipients, Van Dijk (2008) states that the producers activate, using many strategies, a device denominated as K-device, that regulates the expression or the not-expression of knowledge in the discourse. Knowledge that is already shared between the interlocutors do not need to be uttered, and thus can remain implicit – "either because the recipient is believed to have such

knowledge already, or because the recipient is assumed to be able to infer such knowledge from already existing knowledge" (p. 83).

The author states that, in the process of text production, the authors need to insert new information from established assumptions about information that is shared with readers. Hence, in order to write and speak in a more appropriate way, authors need to have "knowledge about the knowledge of the recipients (p. 83)". Thus, when representing the relevant properties to be produced, authors need to come to a model of what the recipients know. These models allow the authors to leave implicitly presented information in a text, and both language users and readers/hearers need to retrieve them through inferences. This inferential ability, according to Marchuschi (2008), corresponds to the capacity of presuming what is already known, and this allows that not all information ought to be included in the texts. Many of these inferences, generated through previous world knowledge, "are subjected to social-cultural influences from the reader's environment" (DELL'ISOLA, 2001, p. 109). Due to this fact, they are called social-cultural inferences and are identified in three levels. Dell'Isola (2001, p. 108) describes these levels as: "text comprehension and its interference in the retrieval of inferences; inferences based on shared knowledge; and inferences that involve affectionate and assessment perception as a consequence of social judgment".

All of these levels, according to the author, are interfered by context, that will assist in knowledge acquirement so that an individual may have the chance of not only interacting with others, but also living together with others. At each new interaction, individuals find themselves in the need to adjust to new contexts that may arise, and this allows them to be able to act in society.

This notion of context, influenced by a sociocognitive perspective, includes social and individual experiences of each person, that is considered as "a social being that presents their own view of the world, linked to the set of experiences lived by them" (DELL'ISOLA, 2001, p. 103). Sharing this idea that all individual experiences and properties of a social situation are relevant for an individual to be able to comprehend and produce discourses, Van Dijk proposes, as aforementioned, an approach to the theory of context.

4.1 Teun van Dijk's approach on Context

One of Van Dijk's (2001, p. 79) main aspect that he seeks to develop in his theory of context, which according to the author needs to be "complex and multidisciplinary", concerns the

importance of taking into account a cognitive interface between social situation and discourse. Such perspective, different from considering that context is restricted to "social, political or historical circumstances or backgrounds of events [...]" (2008, p. 30), presents a theory that is both social and cognitive, for society and cognition are constantly constituting themselves.

According to Van Dijk, this cognitive interface is not taken into consideration in most theories about context. Theoretical approaches expose that the relationship between social situation and discourse is direct, that is, social structures have the ability of directly influencing and affecting discourse. Considering this, context would be merely a mental representation of occurrences and situations. However, according to the author's perspective, this direct relationship does not take place. The relationship between discourse and social situation is actually based on the interpretation that the participants of a communicative event make of it.

Van Dijk (2001) considers this interpretative construction that is made by the participants as a *context model* or, simply, *context itself*. Considering this, as each participant has their own interpretation of a social situation that they are inserted in, the author highlights that context is not constituted in an objective and observable category, in something that is external and apart from the participants – these are the elements that compose a social situation. As the author states, "what really influences and controls discourse is not the 'objective' social situation, but the mental and subjective construction that language users have in their context models" (VAN DIJK, 1997). This approach enables context to be considered as a cognitive aspect, as a mental construction of the participants involved in a communicative event.

This aspect propels the author to defend the existence of a distinction between communicative situation and context. Situation is constituted within the surroundings, including social, interactional and communicative elements. It corresponds to what former studies have frequently denominated 'context'. Context is then constituted in the perception that individuals have about the communicative situation that they are inserted in, that is, in the interpretation that individuals have of their surroundings. This enables context models to be defined as "the subjective interpretation of the context which participants of a communicative situation have of the traits that constitute this situation, such traits being the ones that constrain discourse's production, structure and comprehension" (VAN DIJK, 1997 apud KOCH; BENTES; MORATO, 2011).

Anchoring on this idea, the cognitivist states that many aspects of discourse and communication can be thus explained. For example, the perceptions of each individual in a social situation, the communicative conflicts that can take place due to the possible and different

interpretations of a situation, the negotiation of mutual understanding, the different aspects that are relevant to each individual, the mental processes of discourse production and comprehension, etc.

Based on the cognitive interface between discourse and society, Van Dijk develops his theory of context focusing on the following aspects: contexts are mental models; they are subjective constructions of the individuals with no disregard for their social and inter-subjective proprieties; they are unique experiences; they are dynamic; they are a specific type of experience models; they are widely planned; they are schematic; they have social foundations; and they control discourse production and comprehension.

The mental models are constituted as subjective representations that individuals have of a certain situation in their episodic memory, which is part of our long term memory (VAN DIJK, 2001). They are a result of our experiences and life events, and they have a fundamental importance in the comprehension of discourse, situations and specific events. It is also possible to define them as memory constructions that organize and direct our everyday perception, especially concerning our surroundings, our knowledges and collective and/or individual living experiences. According to the author, such models are organized in abstracts forms or in schemas that repeat themselves frequently. These schemas, as part of the accumulated experiences of the individual, are considered as more or less stable categories. This happens because "although each mental model of a text or situation is thus unique, because of personal circumstances and the contingencies of the present situation, its abstract structure may be 'objectively' defined by people's accumulated perceptions" (VAN DIJK, 2008, p. 61).

As we live different experiences in our everyday life, they allow us to update the mental models we have of such experiences. For example, when we read the same text twice but in different days, we can have a different interpretation than the one we had in the first place. And this happens because there was a change in the model that we had created for this experience. This justifies the many different interpretations that a same text can bring upon the reader (or different readers), since the models that are created are different for each individual (VAN DIJK, 1994).

The context models are constituted as an specific form of these mental models. They are characterized as "experience models of interaction and communication events" (VAN DIJK, 1994, p. 80). Specific mental constructions are developed from what individuals consider as relevant in a communicative situation for the production and interpretation of discourse. Thus, these models do not represent all the personal and social aspects of a certain communicative situation, but only what is regarded as relevant for each individual.

Even when, in a certain communicative situation, many context models are common among the participants (this happens so that individuals can communicate without many problems), the context models, according to Van Dijk (2001), should be considered, at least to a certain extent, as distinct. This should be taken into account because each individual's experiences in everyday situations are not the same. Such aspect enables the context models to be characterized not only as social models, but also as (inter)subjective models.

They are a "mental base", both for production, reception and comprehension of discourses (VAN DIJK, 2001, p. 75). In order to produce a discourse about an event, for instance, the speakers firstly activate (or update) a mental model of this event, that is, what they know about it, their opinion about it, who are the participants involved in this event, what are this event's rules, etc. The main asset that will lead to the activation of this model includes precisely what these speakers consider to be important in the event. Once this context model is produced, the speakers initiate the production of their discourses.

It is possible to observe, then, that once the context models are considered as dynamic, not only the discursive production is also considered as dynamic, but also the comprehension of discourses will be influenced by this dynamicity. Thus, comprehension possibilities are not considered as unique ones. According to Van Dijk (2012), in order for us to understand a text, we access in our episodic memory a few mental models about certain communicative events, and from this, we build a context model about that specific communicative situation.

These context models will help readers/hearers to retrieve information and previous knowledge about a certain text, about a certain communicative event, about the participants involved in this event, etc. This retrieval will enable the comprehension not only of an interlocutor discourse, or a text, but also of a whole communicative event. This shows us that, beyond an association of meanings with words, sentences or discourse, comprehension is a construction of models, including personal opinions and emotions associated with an event which the reader/listener has heard or read about (VAN DIJK, 2012).

Considering this concept of context, it is possible to state that the contextual elements of every communicative event, such as places, time, actions, participants with their roles and relationships between each other, age, etc., are considered as important parts of the processes of comprehension and textual production. However, these interpretations that individuals have about these elements, based on their former experiences, are the ones that will influence text production and comprehension.

Considering the reading activities presented in the schoolbooks analyzed here, taking into account the relevancy of the individuals' inter-subjective interpretations about the contextualization elements that are presented to them in the activities, we can consider that the expected meaning of a text cannot be taken as unique. That is, the possibilities of comprehension can be considered as multiple ones, because the experiences and previous knowledge of the students that are reading the text are different, and what one person considers to be relevant in a text presented in a book/activity may not be considered as relevant in someone else's point of view. However, even when the possibilities of comprehension are multiple because of the reader's different experiences, we consider that the context elements that are present in the reading activities will point to the direction of some comprehensions that are likely to happen.

Thus, we consider that using a Sociocognitive approach to investigate the importance of context in comprehension activities in schoolbooks allows us to consider the student not only as a secondary individual within the process of text comprehension, but as an essentially active individual. Using this approach also allows us to understand that reading activities are much more than simply identifying information in a text.

Using these aspects to investigate the books and to understand what is expected that students learn with them, we can understand Lajolo's (1996) when he states that: "it is only from previous world knowledge that students can build the knowledge that the schoolbooks and the school itself ought to teach them" (p. 3). That is, based on this approach that considers the cognitive interface between society and discourse, it is possible to investigate to what extent the cognitive representations of the students' experiences are important for the construction of knowledge and comprehension of the topics that the schoolbooks propose.

Regarding the research presented here, it is very difficult to know precisely which are the students' cognitive representations and that are linked to their experiences, since we do not know who are the students that have read the analyzed books, and consequently, what are their experiences. We believe that this would only be possible whether a case study was to be conducted in the classroom, with the students that are using the schoolbooks. However, it is possible to deduce and raise assumptions about the probable cognitive representations that the schoolbooks' authors presumably considered to be the experiences lived by their readers. This representation allows the writers to define a student profile that is likely to read the book, and this will influence the elaboration process of the didactic material. For example, when investigating the activities, depending on the type of information that is put forward, on the contextualization elements and on

the contents that are presented, it is possible to deduce what the authors considered relevant to be presented at that time. This selection of what is important or not relevant to be addressed in the didactic work is carried out through the construction of the authors' context models concerning the possible knowledge that students may have about what will be presented in the material. This projection that the authors make about the students' profile is extremely important for the elaboration of all the sections of the schoolbook and its activities. In this article, we will seek to specifically analyze, as aforementioned, the opening section of schoolbooks. In the next section, our analyses will be presented.

5 Analyses

Before we present our analyses, it is important to describe the methodological procedures conducted in this research. As our investigation *corpus* we have selected a collection of schoolbooks approved by the National Program of Schoolbooks (PNLD, 2014) from the Brazilian Elementary Education (6th to 9th grade). This is important to highlight because according to the official document proposed by the Program, the set of schoolbooks destined for this teaching level preferably choose to organize the collections through an exposition of different topics associated to text genres. Thus, the topics are not only presented in a cross-sectional way in the books, but they are fundamental in the organization of the thematic and didactic units. Accordingly, as these units follow the PNLD's (2014) guidelines, they will be permeated by texts that explore more general topics and by activities that propose reflections and discussions about these topics.

In order to present a specific topic approached by these books and to be analyzed in this article, we have selected the topic "adolescence". The analyzed collection was "Vontade de Saber Português"¹. Authors: ALVES, R.; BRUGNEROTTO, T. Publishing House: FTD, 2013.

The first step to analyze our *corpus* was to organize the analyses categories in order to reach the proposed objectives. After we have performed a more closely observation of the *corpus*, we have proposed three categories, named as *macro-categories*, that repeated themselves in the opening sections of the thematic units of the analyzed collection of books. These categories were separated in three general areas: linguistic, cognitive and discursive elements. Based on the assumption that these categories are motivating agents for the processes of comprehension and

¹ In a free translation: "Wishing to Learn Portuguese".

textual production, we have decided to name them as: linguistic, cognitive and discursive motivators. We have selected the lexical item "motivator", in accordance with its meaning: "to provide with a motive or motives; incite; impel." (Collins Free Online Dictionary). Thus, considering that elements inserted in areas more focused on linguistic, cognitive and discursive aspects may influence comprehension and textual production, we can say that they behave as agents that motivate the functioning of such processes.

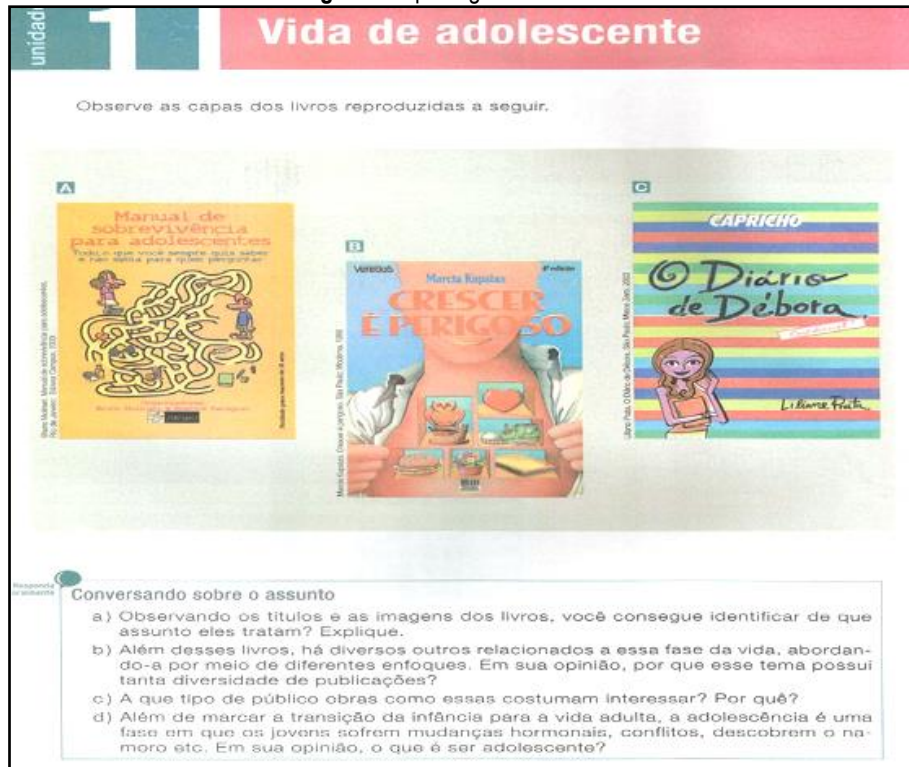
The linguistic motivators present some specificities, that will guide us in constructing our *micro-categories* of analysis. These micro-categories and motivators will be considered as: insertion in topic (IN), titles (T), motivating texts (MT), additional information (AI), pre-inquiries (PI), lexical items (LI) and texts fragments (TF). These motivators will play an important role in the schoolbook: the role of contextualization.

It is possible to state that these macro and micro-categories present their own specificities, and they contribute to the activation of context models that will be essential to guide the discourse comprehension that the schoolbooks present about the topics in the thematic units; they will also be essential to control the discursive production about them.

5.1 Context in the Collection "Vontade de Saber Português"

The opening section of the unit that presents the topic "adolescence" and is presented in the beginning of the book, that is, it opens Unit 1 – being comprised of six units that are presented throughout the volumes. It presents some elements that will guide the student into becoming familiar with the thematic that is presented by the two following didactic units (didactic unit 1: "My first love"; and unit 2: "Relationships in adolescence"), that will also address the same general topic.

Figure 1: Opening Section: Unit 1



Source: "Vontade de Saber Português", 8th grade, page 8.

The title "Life of a teenager" was elected to represent the unit that will be present in the 8th grade volume of the collection. The first "cognitive entry" that is possible to observe in the unit is the presentation of aspects concerning elements that are part of teenagers' experiences (legally, between the age of 12 and 17 years old). The title has the objective of inciting the reader's curiosity about what will be contemplated by the unit in the following pages.

As it is possible to observe, subsequently, the authors present some book covers to the students. They present three book covers, with the following titles: A) "Manual for teenagers' survival: all you ever wanted to know but had no idea who to ask"; B) "Growing up is dangerous"; C) "Débora's diary: confidential!". On cover A, it is possible to observe two teenagers in a maze. It is possible to see some images on the cover, such as hearts, gym equipments, different types of food, notebooks, pencils, erasers and keys. On cover B there is a young boy with an opened shirt, and on his chest it is possible to see different images such as an owl, a heart, a pair of sneakers, flowers and a hamburger. On cover A, besides the title, there is also the image of a teenager holding her diary. Before the reader is given the opportunity to reflect upon what is presented in the book, these three images direct the reader's hypotheses about the set of elements that are part of the

thematic "adolescence", and allow the activation of previous knowledge that the reader may have in order to understand the proposed topic.

After presenting the images, the authors propose a section entitled *Discussing the topic*. In this section, four questions are presented in a table, and right next to it the statement: "answer orally". The authors indicate that the answers to these questions ought to be uttered out loud; orally. In our point of view, this is a good strategy, for it enables the reader to practice an oral genre inside the classroom; and orally exchanging information enables the interlocutors to share their experiences. The instructions do not say with whom these discussions should be conducted, so the students/readers can share their experiences with one or many colleagues in their classroom, or with the teacher. Exchanging experiences is very productive because the participants have different experiences, and this allows the creation of different context models by these interlocutors. The first models that are activated by a student concerning the topic may not converge with the models activated by his/her colleagues that are participating in the same discussion. However, as the readers follow the proposed genre (oral discussion) and are guided by the proposed inquiries, they can share their answers/experiences and find out other reader's opinion about the topic. It also allows them to be aware of the approaches that the book presents on the topic "adolescence".

As this topic will be presented throughout the whole thematic unit of the book, from this part of the schoolbook the students become familiar with the set of topics within this thematic. The role of this opening section is to insert the student into the topic. This familiarity and the title of the unit, as aforementioned, are constituted as elements that will contribute to the reader's contextualization about what he/she is reading and what he/she will encounter throughout the unit. Therefore, we consider them as the two micro-categories of analysis that integrate the pre-instructions that are presented, as it is possible to observe, in only one page of the thematic unit opening section.

According to Jurado (2003), the contextualization stimulates the reader and the interlocutor to re-construct their knowledge, mobilize their logical thinking, their experiences, their problem-solving abilities, as well as other cognitive competences. These competences allow these elements that play the role of contextualization in a text and/or communicative situation to be regarded as a resource to present the students with a meaningful learning experience. And this happens because they give support to the readers when conducting the set of activities that will assist them in constructing knowledge about what they are reading. For these elements to be presented, it is first

necessary to assume that every knowledge "involves a relationship between *subject and object*, not regarding the student as a passive spectator. Thus, the content is a mean to develop competences and not an end in itself" (p. 41).

These remarks presented by the author are extremely important for they reflect what is proposed in this collection of schoolbooks through the contextualization elements that are presented in the thematic and didactic units. In the opening section, the titles, the three magazine covers and the four questions that follow, guide the readers in becoming familiar with the contents about the topic "adolescence" that will be proposed throughout the unit; and they also prompt the readers to mobilize their cognitive competences through the context models that are gradually activated as they read the schoolbook.

According to Jurado (2003), it is possible to observe that the authors of the books, when using these contextualization elements, do not consider the students as a passive observer and put them in a more active position. They prompt the students, using the questions and instructions in the part "Discussing the topic", to read and discuss the topic, proposing a link to the previously presented images in the section, so that they can assume a critical thinking position about what they see and about the topics presented by the images. Furthermore, these elements complement the student insertion in the topic that is presented in the early beginning of the unit, in its title. This happens more specifically in the three first questions.

In the first question, the authors instruct the students to observe the titles and the images containing the covers of three books and ask if they can identify the main topic that these books present. An important aspect in the question is the fact that the authors emphasize the book titles: "Manual for teenagers' survival: all you ever wanted to know but had no idea who to ask"; "Growing up is dangerous" and "Débora's diary: confidential!". This emphasis is considered relevant because every textual and discursive production mobilizes the activation, and consequently, the production of context models. And the elaboration of the titles follow the same logic. They mobilize the activation of possible context models, such as: teenagers need a manual that clarify some questions so that they can survive; most of the times teenagers do not know with whom they should seek for answers to their questions; reaching adolescence is dangerous, and can frighten people that are reaching this period of life; and the period of adolescence has some secrets that need to be kept confidential. The activation of these models mobilizes the readers to become aware of the topics that are presented by the covers of the books, and allows them to answer the questions proposed by the instructions and explain the topics that are put forward on the covers of the books.

In the second question, the authors affirm that, besides the books that they demonstrate, many others books present topics related to the period of adolescence, using different approaches and focuses. Subsequently they prompt the students to reflect upon the reason why there is such a diversity of publications about this topic. It is possible to observe that they are guiding the readers – before giving the information that there are many publications about this topic – into creating models that guide them into considering that there is a variety of publications about adolescence and with different approaches and focuses. This guidance and/or directing process, probably influences the reader to associate such diversity to which the authors cite as a multiplicity of interests, conflicts and questions, that teenagers have when seeking for self-knowledge and self-awareness. And possibly, so that the teenagers can have theirs questions clarified, these publications are then required.

As a complement to this second question, the authors present a third one, in which they present the readers with this inquiry: “which audiences would be more interested in these publications and why?” When the authors make the reference to “these publications”, they retrieve the presentation of the covers from the first moment, and the many other books that address aspects related to teenagers and youngsters cited in the second question. As they prompt the students to retrieve these types of information, the context models that were previously activated can positively influence the readers in answering that the audience that would be more interested in these books is the young audience, or the teenagers themselves, since the thematics presented in the mentioned publications will probably help teenagers to find answers to some questions that appear in this period of their life.

Lastly, in the fourth question, the authors present a statement, and then, based on it, they introduce a question. The fourth question is presented as follows: “Besides featuring a transition from infancy into adulthood, adolescence is a period in which young people go through hormonal changes, conflicts, learn about dating, etc. In your opinion, what does it mean to be a teenager?” This question is interesting since it inserts the readers into the topic that will be presented in the unit, and it also allows them to answer the three previous questions and influences them into accessing new models that will guide their comprehension about the common understanding of this thematic. The models concerning hormonal changes, conflicts and dating, begin to be accessed and elaborated in accordance with the characteristics that are part of this period of life: the adolescence. They are accessed based on the vocabulary selection that the authors have presented in the characterization of this period of life. This vocabulary selection is based on the

comprehension that the authors have about the characteristics presented by adolescence, which is anchored in the very context models that are accessed by the writers.

Hence, it is possible to notice that the choice of lexical items in this example acts in combination with the cognitive motivators, which mobilize the activation of context models that influence not only the very comprehension that the authors have about this topic, but also the comprehension that the readers will have about it. Marcuschi (2007) remarks the role of cognitive representations associated to lexical items, and highlights the importance of considering them as mental representations that are not unchanging, for they can "originate a set of associate relationships depending on other items that appear with them" (p. 135). Namely, the action of their choices that are used in a communicative situation or in the schoolbook activities, for example, are the result of the authors' and readers' mental representations.

Besides the action that is promoted by the cognitive motivators, the fourth question, as well as the other questions altogether with the title of the unit and the presented images, motivate a set of actions from the discursive motivators, since they insert the readers into the topic "adolescence" that will be presented in the unit and guide them into understanding a few discourses that are generated as they complete the activities in the section, such as: the adolescence period of life presents us with some questions and inquiries, it promotes a few conflicts, presents some secrets and offers us a few discoveries.

6 Final Remarks

It is possible to note that the opening section of the analyzed schoolbook was elaborated using strategies that would allow the readers to activate previous knowledge as they read it, and consequently, to trigger cognitive motivators that would mobilize the comprehension processes and therefore the discursive processes about the text that was being read, as well as the thematic proposed by these texts. We could also verify that the analyzed collection of books presented concepts that were aligned with the fact that comprehension is a process in which the readers not only would have conditions to give their opinion about what they had read in the opening section, but would also be able to interact with the texts presented in the section, stating their opinions about them.

Therefore, it is possible to notice that the vast majority of readers was motivated to read beyond the linguistic materiality that was expressed in the text. That is, they were put in a more

active position in the process of comprehending the topic, that in many occasions would prompt them to reflect upon the meaning of a few expressions and lexical items inserted in certain contextualizations. This reflection would give space for the students in a way that they would not be limited to the literal aspects of what was textually visible, because in order to achieve the purpose of what was asked of them, they needed – when reading, for example, certain expressions and lexical items – to activate their previous experiences and cognitive elaborations about them, so that they could comprehend the topics within a certain contextualization and also build new cognitive representations about them.

However, we have observed that – even though the collection sought to present perspectives that tried to prompt the readers to assume a more active role in the process of comprehension and to be able to develop their cognitive competences – the collection has tried to include an *apparently multiple* discursive construction about the topic that was presented throughout it. We consider it an *apparently multiple* discursive construction because, even considering the fact that there are several possible discourses about teenagers, we believe that they are part of a naturalization that is established in our society about what teenagers are.

Thus, probably in order to attend to ideologically motivated interests from the many groups, institutions and national programs that are indirectly or directly involved in the elaboration of the schoolbooks, other discourses about the topics may be put aside. And this causes the students to keep these mental models about certain groups and social situations (with their representations, roles, etc) crystalized, and thus they do not become eager to (re)elaborate such models based on new (inter)subjective interpretations.

Based on these results, we believe that if there was a motivation for the student to read texts which, in addition to the guiding information already concretized and the models already activated, also showed them a possible existence of the many other paths to be treaded, probable (re)elaborations of context models would take place, influencing the students to comprehend through other approaches and alternatives the topics addressed by the books. That would give the students the chance to, – when encountering a discursive plurality that is not necessarily limited to paradigms –, display the attitude of an effectively critic reader, that between many possible actions is capable of: making their own choices, and thus playing an active role in their discursive construction about the addressed topics; raising inquires; confronting, or accepting, through oral or written practice, the discourses that are presented by the books; seeking to understand the author's objectives when presenting certain texts in the units to address the topics; trying to perceive the

author's ideological points of view about the texts and topics selected to be discussed; understanding what is the expected reader profile that the author's assume for the books; and reflecting about the period in which the texts presented in the schoolbooks were written and compare them to the actual moment in which they are being read, in order to discover which discourses, about the same topics, remain and which change throughout time and also understand the reasons for their possible changes or permanence.

To increase the motivation for reading these texts, we believe that the work of teachers inside the classroom is extremely relevant. It is important that teachers – when faced with the strategies used by schoolbooks that prompt the readers to activate context models essentially anchored in social crystallizations – give the students the opportunity to read different types of texts, complete other kinds of activities and raise different discussions that are not presented by the schoolbook, in order to incite a more critical vision of the world around them.

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