

# LEARNING PORTUGUESE THROUGH THE ART OF FILM



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**Abstract:** Although the elements of film narrative (e.g., sound, color, lighting, camera angles, mise-en-scène) can create meaning and provoke responses from the viewer, in Portuguese as a foreign language classes such cinematographic aspects of films are rarely emphasized. The use of films as works of art, however, can be a powerful tool to engage students in a dialogical construction of knowledge. The goal of this article is to investigate the power of films as works of art studied from a more dialogical perspective in Portuguese as a foreign language classes. In this article, I discuss the main cinematographic features, their implications for film narrative, and give suggestions on how to conduct a Portuguese as a foreign language class from a more ecological perspective of learning through the use of films as an art form. Data collected from the students' learning Portuguese that shows the positive impact of this type of approach to teaching is also presented.

**Keywords:** film narrative, dialogical approach, Portuguese as a foreign language, cinematographic features.

## 1. Introduction

The use of videos and films in second and foreign language (L2) classrooms is not a new endeavor (e.g., Canning-Wilson, 2000; Golden, 2001; Istanto, 2009; Kaiser, 2011; Sherman, 2003; Williamson & Vincent, 1996). They are considered great sources for exploring the culture, history, and linguistic aspects of the target language; a fun and interesting way to expose students to authentic input; and a stimulating way to involve them in the production of meaningful output, both in oral and written formats. Many times, however, the artistic and cinematographic aspects of films are not explored in L2 classrooms and wonderful opportunities to engage students in reflection about these artistic qualities are left out. These aspects are, nevertheless, essential for understanding the various layers of meaning that go beyond the surface of the film. For instance, a certain camera angle might be a way to communicate something, or the choice of a certain color might have the intention of eliciting certain emotions or feelings from the viewer.

When students look at films from an artistic point of view (e.g., lighting, camera movement, color, shots, camera angles, and so forth), they start interacting with the images and sounds on the screen in a deeper way. A unique opportunity for students to interact, create meaning together, and express their voices is therefore generated. As we allow our students to

contribute with their own perceptions and recognize their investment, they feel comfortable in initiating and creating meaning dialogically (Bakhtin, 1986, 1992). We then move on to a much broader understanding of learning.

Various studies in second language have argued for a more ecological learning approach (e.g., Kramsch & Steffensen, 2008; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008), which is holistic by nature and not dualistic (e.g., right/wrong; native/non-native speakers; learner/teacher). Ecological theories of learning ask us as teachers to rethink our role in the classroom, since they take into consideration “the notions of interdependence, dynamicity, and dialogism” (Kramsch & Steffensen, 2008, p. 24). They require us to deal with uncertainty in a non-linear teaching approach. As this understanding of learning unfolds, new questions arise. For instance, how could the interface between theory and practice be reflected in our daily classes as teachers of Portuguese as a foreign language (PFL)? What could PFL teachers do in order to promote a more dialogical interaction? In order to address this challenge, I suggest the use of films as works of art in Portuguese as a foreign language (PFL) classes, an activity which has the potential to create an environment in a more dialogical fashion. Approaching films as works of art can help us move away from a dualistic point of view (e.g., the teacher is the only source of knowledge), thus enabling teachers to access more dynamic, non-linear systems (Larsen-Freeman, 1997); for example, students might go beyond the class plan and surprise the teacher - and even themselves.

It is important to note that I do not propose that this approach should be the only, or even the best, approach on films as pedagogical tools in PFL. There are a number of different aspects of films that could and should be explored in a PFL class, such as, among others, the various cultural elements portrayed in the films, the sociopolitical and ideological implications, as well as the language employed and its sociolinguistic entanglements. Such procedures have been employed by language instructors in foreign language classrooms (e.g., Pegrum, 2008; Stewart & Pertusa, 2004; Sturm, 2012; King, 2002), and they are not the focus of this article. The article, however, focuses on a much less explored – and often neglected - aspect of films; that is, how the exploration of the cinematographic elements can enrich students and help them advance their learning in a PFL class.

The pedagogical application suggested in this article is appropriate for upper-beginner level or above. The PFL teacher may choose whether she/he would show the film with subtitles or not. In my class, I decided to show the film with Portuguese subtitles because I asked the students their preference and they said they preferred to watch the film with subtitles. In addition, there is a number of studies (e.g., Alipour, Gorjian, & Kouravand, 2012; Ebrahimi & Bazaee, 2016; Sabouri & Zohrabi, 2015) that have shown that students who are exposed to films with subtitles in the target language feel are more

engaged, and learn more vocabulary and content comprehension than those exposed to films without subtitles. Nevertheless, PFL teachers should consider their students' needs and goals in order to decide whether subtitles would be appropriate for their classes.

This article begins with a brief discussion of the main cinematographic elements in the film narrative. Then, considerations of cinematographic features in scenes from the Brazilian Portuguese films *Abril Despedaçado* (Cohn & Salles, 2001) and *Raízes e Asas* (Cabral & Pimenta, 2011), and how these features can be explored dialogically in a PFL class are provided. Students' perceptions of learning Portuguese through the art of film are also given.

## 2. The Elements of Film Discourse

As works of art, films deal with creativity and imagination. When teachers and students watch a film, they are taken to a different world, one filled with enchantment, magic, and intellectual and emotional engagement. As Green (1995) points out, encounters with works of art lead to *defamiliarization* of the ordinary. Films are able to do that not only because of visual and aural cinematic language, but also because of what we do not see or hear on the screen. Much of the meaning making in films comes from an ongoing process of comparison between what we see and what we do not see (Monaco, 2009). When our students learn to perceive films as art, they start looking at them actively instead of watching them passively (Barsam & Monahan, 2010). They realize that by using all the cinematographic resources filmmakers manipulate what the audience sees in order to transport them to the world of the story.

Film directors use various cinematographic elements in order to produce meaning, such as lighting, shadow, sound, silence, colors, position of the camera, camera angles, camera movement, *mise-en-scène*, editing, and focus<sup>1</sup>. The associations that we make between an object or a detail and the idea that it represents (metonymy) and our perception of part to whole (synecdoche) help us understand the connotative meanings in films. As films are explored in PFL classes, teachers can bring up these terminologies and open the class to discussion of their possible interpretation.

The main cinematographic elements of film discourse that can be explored in a language class are:

### ***Lighting***

Lighting calls our attention and guides our eyes. It can be a way to express moods and reveal the intimate secrets of a character. For instance, the contrast between darkness and light might signal a struggle between good

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<sup>1</sup> Since the analysis of elements of film narrative might be a new topic for PFL teachers, I suggest the book "Looking at Movies" (Barsam & Monahan - now in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition) for a general introduction to the topic.

and evil; a light that comes from below and distorts the character's face (sometimes called *Halloween lighting*) reveals the character's state of mind. In Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund's *Cidade de Deus* (Ranvaud, Ribeiro, Salles, & Meirelles, Lund, 2002), for example, there is a constant contrast between the sunlight on the beach, where the young people are having fun and are happy, and the much darker places in the houses in the *favela*, or shantytown.

### **Color**

Colors and their various shades can emphasize aspects of the narrative. In the scene in which Orfeu descends the stairs to the underground world in Marcel Camus' *Orfeu negro* (Gordine & Camus, 1959), a red color is shown at the end of the long stairway, conveying the idea that Orfeu will soon enter a different world. The lack of bright colors can also convey meaning. In Bruno Barreto's *O que é isso, companheiro?* (Barreto, Barreto, & Barreto, 1997), the scenes are mostly dark. The lack of bright colors, along with a claustrophobic environment, give the viewer a sense of tension and oppression.

### **Camera angles**

Depending on the camera angle, that is, the position of the camera in relation to the subject, the image can convey connotative meanings. A high-angle shot (the camera is above the action) shows the characters as very small, and sometimes it is almost impossible to see them; this often conveys the idea of inferiority, hopelessness, or fear. By way of contrast, a low-angle shot (the camera is below the action) gives the character a sense of superiority. In *Cidade de Deus* (Ranvaud, Ribeiro, Salles, & Meirelles, Lund, 2002), the shot that shows Dadinho killing Marreco is a low-angle shot. Various subsequent shots of Dadinho from a similar angle give the viewer the sense that Dadinho is becoming more and more powerful, as he changes from Dadinho to Zé Pequeno.

/The camera is the eye through which the viewers witness the action. The director might choose to show a scene (or an entire film) from different points of view (POV). For instance, in Anselmo Duarte's *O pagador de promessas* (Massaini & Duarte, 1962), when Zé do Burro, carrying his cross and following the religious procession, is going up the stairs towards the church, he is looking at the image of Our Lady, which is being carried by devotees. At this moment, the camera shows the image of Our Lady from the point of view of Zé do Burro (we see what he is seeing). The camera goes back to him and we have the point of view of the image (we see what the image of Our Lady is "seeing"). This goes back and forth a number of times as Zé do Burro goes up the stairs. Each time the camera moves closer helps to build an interconnection between Zé do Burro and Our Lady. Through POV, the viewer can experience Zé do Burro's state of mind.

### **Shot**

/A shot is "one uninterrupted run of the camera" (Barsam & Monahan, 2010,

p. 557). Shots are also a great technological tool with which to convey meaning; a close-up, for instance, calls the viewer's attention to a particular detail. Whereas a close-up forces the viewer to look where the director wants the viewer to look, a long shot gives the viewer more choices. When Jorge and Helena are talking in Paulo Thiago's *Jorge, Um Brasileiro* (Molleta, Camargos, Peixe, & Thiago, 1988), various shots of their faces, eyes, hands, and arms are shown. These close-ups have a sexual connotation and suggest that the characters' eyes are looking at each other's bodies despite their trivial and inconsequential conversation; for example, the camera pans along the man's arm as if it were the woman's eyes. These shots are good examples of synecdoche (part standing for whole), which can have different meanings depending on the context of the film.

### **Sound**

There are two types of sounds: diegetic (sounds that are part of the world of the story) and non-diegetic (sounds that come from outside the story). When Helena and Cláudio appear for the first time in Daniel Filho's *Se eu fosse você* (Britz, Didonet, Lustosa, Barbosa, Filho, & Filho 2006), Helena slowly gets up while Cláudio stays in bed. She stretches and walks towards her daughter's bedroom. Her movements are accompanied by instrumental music. This song is non-diegetic, since we hear it but cannot identify the source and the character Helena also cannot hear the music. Helena goes inside her daughter's room and wakes her up. Helena slowly removes her daughter's earphones (she had gone to sleep listening to her iPod). At this moment, we can hear the music coming from her earphones: This is an example of diegetic sound.

### **Editing**

Editing can be defined as "the process by which the editor combines and coordinates individual shots into a cinematic whole" (Barsan & Monahan, 2010, p. 547). There are various ways in which shots can be put together. Parallel shots, for example, are shots of two or more separate actions intercut back and forth. In João Daniel Tikhomiroff's *Besouro* (Amorim & Tikhomiroff, 2009), a parallel scene shows Besouro playing *capoeira* while his master is being killed. Parallel shots give the sense that separate actions are occurring at the same time; this technique can be used to build tension.

Sometimes, ellipsis (omission of intervals or sections of the narrative or action) occurs in movies. Ellipsis can produce dramatic as well as comic effects. Ellipsis can also be a result of censorship, cultural taboo, or merely a way of condensing time. In *O Pagador de Promessas* (Massaini & Duarte, 1962), Rosa ends up in a hotel room with Bonitão. The scene ends with Bonitão closing the door. Next morning, Rosa leaves the hotel by herself. Although there is a gap in the narrative, the viewer infers that she did not spend the night alone.

### **Mise-en-scène**

*Mise-en-scène* is a broad concept; it may be defined as “the overall look and feel of the movie – the sum of everything we the audience sees, hears, and experiences while viewing it” (Barsam & Monahan, 2010, p. 156). For the purpose of our classes, it is important for students to identify objects or props that are part of the movie and reflect on their possible functions. For instance, at the beginning of the film *Central do Brasil* (Ranvaud, Cohn, & Salles, 1998), directed by Walter Salles, Josué and his mother are leaving Central Station together when suddenly his mother has a fatal accident. At this moment, Josué, who has been holding his spinning top all the time, loses his toy. The top then gains other layers of meaning and becomes much more than a toy. Along with the toy, Josué loses his family, his innocence, and his childhood. He is now alone in the world. Josué is reunited with his family again at the end of the movie. When Josué encounters his brothers, one of them makes a new spinning top for him. The viewer understands that, along with the toy, Josué has his family and his happiness back; he is at home. Objects or props can acquire symbolic meaning throughout a movie and be important components of the *mise-en-scène*.

### 3. Participants

The activities proposed were part of an intermediate course given by the author of this article. The participants were American students who were learning Portuguese as a foreign language in an American university. They were enrolled in their third semester of Portuguese. They were Spanish-English bilinguals who were learning Portuguese as their third language. This course was designed to enhance learners’ oral and written skills while engaging them through films on a broad range of topics related to Lusophone culture.

This course also aimed to help students use the three modes of communication defined by ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages). For instance, in the interpersonal communication component, students may talk among themselves (in groups or in class as a whole), and exchange and build ideas and understanding together (e.g., discussion on the metonymic meanings of the prevalent color brown at the beginning of *Abril Despedaçado*). In interpretative communication component, students may interpret scenes from the films, giving emphasis on what has stood out for them, such as idiosyncratic cultural differences (e.g., students research “Sertão” before seeing *Abril Despedaçado* and relate their research to aspects of the film as discussions unfold in class). In the presentation communication component, students may create their own messages, providing their understanding and interpretations (e.g., after watching *Raiões e Asas*, students write about a moment in which they felt completely free, linking their personal experiences to the message of the film).

#### 4. The activities in focus

In this section, I examine ways in which these and other cinematographic elements can be explored in PFL classes through two Brazilian movies, *Abril Despedaçado* (Cohn & Salles, 2001) and *Raízes e Asas* (Cabral & Pimenta, 2011). Even though the article focuses only on two films, the content explored in this article can be applied to other films. Some questions are posed throughout the next section in order to show the reader possible ways to encourage students to engage in discussions. It is important to emphasize that the questions presented in this article are suggestions to keep the class discussion flowing, and not a way to dictate the direction of the discussions. In order to obtain a more dialogical environment, the teacher should give students opportunities to initiate, disagree, suggest, and raise their own questions for discussion, as well as have their own metaphorical and metonymical interpretation of the scenes.

Learning is much more than interaction with input; rather learning consists of “processes of socialization, that is, learning processes in their own right” (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007, p. 909). The questions raised by the PFL teacher help students focus on the elements of film narrative and learn how to pay attention to them. Very soon, students will be able to analyze the cinematographic elements with minimal help from the teacher. Students could have small group discussions and then share their opinions with the class. Small groups are a great way to promote negotiation of meaning with less interference from the instructor, giving students more freedom to express their voices and build community among themselves. The teacher could visit each group discussion while students are discussing, and help them with their difficulties or mistakes. Another possibility is for the teacher to write down the mistakes or difficulties she/he noticed in the group discussions, and discuss them in class as a whole after the discussion in groups is over.

##### 4.1 *Abril Despedaçado* (from 2:18 to 4:18 minutes)

The teacher could invite students to watch the opening scene of the feature film *Abril Despedaçado* (Cohn & Salles, 2001), directed by Walter Salles and released in 2001. Then, the class could focus on a sequence of shots that lasts two minutes, starting from 2:18 minutes and ending at 4:18 minutes. The teacher should advise the students to pay attention to the camera movements, colors, objects, space, and narration. He/she could invite them to pay attention to these elements by asking, for instance, “*What do these elements tell us about the movie?*”.

The PFL teacher can help the students reflect on the cinematographic resources by asking them a number of questions (e.g., “*What is the first thing*

*we see in this sequence?*)<sup>2</sup>. It is important to give students time to answer the questions and let them pose new questions or make comments. Salles starts the film by showing a sugar cane machine from above. (*“Why do you think the director choose to shoot from above? What does this image suggest to us?”*) The machine is the center in these initial shots, which thus highlights its importance. The machine is in control and we can barely see the people. The machine is pulled by bulls and makes a constant circular movement. The camera follows this non-stop circular movement, forcing us, as viewers, to feel its movement. The animals and the people are walking in circles. (*“What may a circular movement suggest?”*) There is movement, but they do not move forward. This idea of stagnation is reinforced by the narration when the character Pacu mentions that this type of work has been done since the days of slavery; not much seems to have changed since then. Both the people and the animals are connected with this machine, putting them more or less on the same level. It is almost as if the machine controls them, and not the other way around. Here one might say that the sugar cane machine gains another meaning: It seems to represent the family, and is a metaphor for their lives.

(*“What is the most predominant color in this sequence?”*) There is basically one color: brown (the characters’ clothes, the landscape, the sugar cane machine, the bulls). (*“What can we relate the color brown to?”*) Brown may be linked to the geographic area: the dry region of Sertão, in the northeast of Brazil, where the film is set, an area where there is not much green and not much rain. Brown color everywhere might also emphasize the sense of sameness: It is not a colorful world and life is hard, not much fun. As the dialogue among the students progresses, the teacher might introduce some cinematographic terms. When we relate the color brown to our senses, we are talking about metonymy, the relations that one can make between an object and what that object might represent.

Pacu starts introducing each member of the family. Each one has his or her own obligation: The father makes the machine work by pulling the bulls; the brother puts the cane inside the machine; and the mother collects the waste. Here we encounter the metaphorical power of language. It might not make much sense now, but, as the film progresses, it becomes clear that this description is a metaphor for the family. There is an ongoing blood feud between this family and their neighbors that has been going on for generations. The father insists on revenge, and does not want to put a stop to the feud; the brother is the next one to be killed, feeding this war machine that never ends; and the mother is the one that suffers, who collects what is left from this senseless war.

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<sup>2</sup> In order to provide PFL teachers with suggestions of questions for students in the appropriate context, from now on, the questions will appear in parenthesis, and within quotations, throughout the article whenever questions on the elements of the films are relevant.



While we hear the narrator Pacu saying that sometimes God gives us heavy burdens that we cannot bear, we see Pacu trying unsuccessfully to lift a bunch of sugar cane branches. His older brother comes to help him and carries the bunch of sugar cane branches for Pacu. (*“What does this action tell us about the brother’s personality and about the relationship between them?”*) Students then start making predictions and establishing a connection with the film.

Pacu talks about the place where they live: It is isolated, in the middle of nowhere. (*“Does the image contribute to the film’s narrative?”*) The image is a long shot (it shows the entire place and the surroundings), where we can have a good idea of how isolated the family is. The landscape dominates the shot. In this long shot, the people are very small and we can hardly see them, which emphasizes their loneliness and desolation. The image both complements and contributes to the narrative.

Pacu talks about how hot the place is. Then we have a shot of his mother going inside the house. (*“What relation can we make between this shot and what Pacu just said?”*) Inside the house it is dark; the light is outside. This contrast highlights how bright and strong the sun is, and how cool it must be inside the house.

Now, the PFL class can have a more general discussion about the entire sequence and the connections that students might make with it. (*“So far, what do we know about this family? Are they happy? Are they close? What do you think will happen next in the film? How the film will develop?”*)

As a suggestion for a follow-up activity, the teacher could ask students to write a short essay in which they write a narration for the sequence analyzed from the point of view of a character other than the actual narrator, Pacu. The teacher might ask students to volunteer to read their work, and a reflection on the different perspectives could be done (e.g., *“What have we learned from the brother that we did not learn from Pacu?”*).

#### **4.2 Raízes e Asas (first 45 seconds)**

Sound gives life to what we see on screen. A good way to help students realize the effects of sound in a film is to show them a scene without sound and then show the same scene again, this time with sound. The teacher may play the first 45 seconds of the Brazilian short subject *Raízes e Asas* (Cabral & Pimenta, 2011), directed by Renato Cabral and Luis Felipe Pimenta, and released in 2011. This film is an example of digital cinema, and you might use this moment to have a brief discussion with the students about this new genre. (*“What do you see in this sequence? What are they doing? How do you describe the man? What is the man wearing? What can we infer about him? What connections might there be between the man and the child?”*)

After a brief discussion about this sequence, shown without sound, the teacher may show the students the sequence again, this time with sound. (*“Does the sound change our perception? What types of sound do we have?”*) In this

sequence, the sounds of a Volkswagen Beetle and some music are played. At this moment, the teacher can introduce these two types of sounds in films: diegetic and non-diegetic. In this sequence, the sounds related to the Beetle (e.g., the man closes the car door) are diegetic, and the music is non-diegetic.

Now, let's go back to the first shots, when the child is playing with a toy car. (*“What type of sound can we hear?”*) The sound of a real car is heard, although we have the image of the toy car. The scene that follows shows the Beetle, which is the source of the sound. (*“What can we infer from this scene and the way the director plays with the sound?”*) Although the two shots happen in different locations and at different times (the man and the child are not together), the sound of the car links these two worlds. This asynchronous sound (the sound of the car is heard before the car appears on screen) might let the viewer infer that the lives of these two people are somehow linked.

The teacher can also explore the camera angles in this sequence. (*“When the camera shows the child playing with the toy car, what position is the camera in? What might the camera position imply?”*) The camera is located on the floor, at the level of the child. This is a way to put the viewer on the same level as the child. The level of intimacy is much higher. The viewers are not observers; they are participants.

There is an object that repeats in these scenes: the Volkswagen Beetle. The teacher could ask the students if they have any idea why the Beetle is a constant in this sequence. The idea of patterns in films and their possible implications can be introduced. The Beetle has a symbolic value and it represents, among other things, the link between the present and past (this assumption might not be so easy to perceive from just the first 45 seconds of the film, however).

In the subsequent shots, the teacher has the opportunity to introduce more terms related to the cinematographic world and to help students reflect on their effects. In various shots, it is possible to see the reflection of the man in the car's mirrors; his image is then duplicated. (*“Do you have any idea why the director decides to shoot the man's reflection in the mirror instead of shooting the character directly?”*) It might be a way of adding another layer of mystery as to who this man is. Filming his image in the mirror might suggest a certain ambiguity and obscurity regarding the character's identity. (*“Is he the guy who is in the mirror (the reflection) or the guy who is driving the car?”*) The reflection in the mirror gives us an idea of recursion, and is a resource that filmmakers use called *mise en abîme*.

When we observe this sequence closely, we notice that it shows parts of the man's body: his shoulders, his arms, and his hands. This cinematographic strategy, called synecdoche, might be a way to highlight his tattoos, the fact that he has no shirt, and is unshaven. We can also see that he is comfortable driving his Beetle and that he feels at home. We can go further and say that the fact that the main character is shirtless and has tattoos is actually an

expression of freedom. It is the character's way of showing ownership of his own life, and is not related to being violent or reckless. This is an opportunity to talk about expectations in films, and how sometimes directors opt to play against our expectations and then surprise us.

As a suggestion for a follow-up activity, the teacher could ask students to write a short essay about their personal understanding of freedom, and ask them to write about a moment in which they felt free. I would suggest continuing the dialogue in writing (e.g., the teacher could continue the dialogue by writing a personal and meaningful response to the students in their essays).

A suggestion of an activity that goes beyond the limitations of the classroom is to have the students contact some professional that is involved in the film if the teacher feels that this is relevant for the class. In my class, during the discussions of *Raiões e Asas*, students came up with interesting commentaries and questions, many of them without a definitive response (e.g., *What does the director want to say about the word 'raízes'? Why are the boy and the man always apart from each other?*). I then decided to contact one of the directors of the film, Renato Cabral, and ask him if he would be willing to communicate with my students via email. Mr. Cabral kindly accepted my request. After a discussion in class about contacting Mr. Cabral and the types of questions that students might be willing to ask him, several students wrote to Mr. Cabral and began a dialogue with him. Then, the students talked in class about the responses they received as well as about their perceptions of the experience. The students enjoyed and learned from the experience of contacting Mr. Cabral, as shown by their anonymous responses to an online question about their perception of the activity. Below, I report some of the students' responses: *"Very nice opportunity!"*; *"It is an amazing opportunity, very humbling to know a director is eager to hear from us."*; *"It was something really cool to contact the director."*; *"Awesome opportunity. Thanks for reaching out to him and allowing us to contact him."*; *"I think this is awesome, it really connects us to culture in Brazil."*; *"Yes, it gives us a chance to reach out to someone about something we are studying."*; *"Great idea."*; *"Very cool."*; *"It was a great opportunity to contact a native Portuguese speaker."*; *"Amazing!!!"*

## **5. Students' evaluation of the learning of Portuguese through the art of film**

In order to continue the dialogical approach of teaching Portuguese through the art of film, it is important to obtain the student's evaluation of the class. At the end of the semester, I asked students to answer a survey in order to obtain their feedback on the class and on the various class activities we developed throughout the semester. One of the questions of the survey invites students to reflect on the learning of Portuguese through the art of film. The survey was done online and their responses were anonymous. Table

1 shows the specific question and a sample of the students' responses to the question related to their experience learning Portuguese through focusing on the cinematographic aspects of the films.

**Table 1. Students' evaluation of learning Portuguese through the art of film**

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**Question:** In this course, we focused on learning Portuguese through the analysis of films as art (e.g., sound, color, symbols, metaphor, positions of the camera, ellipses, etc.). What is your opinion about this type of approach to films in Portuguese classes?

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*Very interesting, good for discussion.*

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*Love this approach.*

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*Very good tactics.*

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*Enjoy it very much.*

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*I really like it, it was helpful.*

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*Excellent. It helped analyze foreign films that demonstrate cultures we are unfamiliar with and help learn a lot about them.*

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*I liked it.*

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*I really enjoyed this class. In a sense it is the same as literature but taking it into the film aspects which I really enjoyed.*

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*I think it is a very interesting and in depth way to learn.*

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*It's a different approach that I have never seen used in other courses.*

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*Very effective.*

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*Eu gosto dessa abordagem porque permite a discussão em classe. Nós temos que trabalhar com as novas palavras, mas de uma forma interessante e artística.*

*'I like this approach because it allows discussion in class. We have to work on new words, but in an interesting and artistic way.'*

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## 6. Conclusion

The notion of learning a second language has moved away from a dualistic point of view (e.g., the teacher teaches and students learn) to a much more dynamic and ecological approach, acknowledging the complex nature of learning itself. This approach has posed new challenges for language teachers, since it requires teachers to rethink their role in the classroom. The exploration of films as art in PFL classes is a powerful affordance for learning Portuguese and a rich resource for dialogical interactions in the classroom, since students share experiences and are recognized for what they know and not just what they need to learn. The use of cinematographic resources in PFL classes helps develop this interactive environment. For instance, it opens space for students to express their understanding and thoughts (e.g., when students explored the metonymic meanings of the colors in *Abril Despedaçado*) and gives students opportunities to be agents of their own learning (e.g., when students decided to contact the director of *Raiões e Asas* and start a dialogue with him). As students learn to look at films actively, and to decipher and interpret their codes, they gain encouragement to take risks and contribute new perspectives. As students learn from and with each other, new routes of learning are created. PFL teachers might then deal with unpredictability and the possibility of various outcomes, moving teachers toward a more non-linear approach to language learning. Learning becomes more complex, yet much more interesting.

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