

Jouët-Pastré, Clémence, and Patricia Isabel Sobral. *Viajando através do alfabeto. A Reading and Writing Program for Intermediate to Advanced Portuguese.* Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2010.

The newest addition to intermediate/advanced Portuguese language textbooks by Focus Publishing is based on Moacyr Scliar's *Dicionário do viajante insólito*, which is a compilation of *crônicas* related to travels. Taking these *crônicas* as a starting point, the authors of *Viajando através do alfabeto* have developed grammar, style, and writing exercises that provide students with opportunities to review what they have learned (in the case of grammar), to learn something new (likely in the case of style), and to combine these two skills in order to produce original texts.

Jouët-Pastré and Sobral list several reasons for having chosen the *crônicas* in Scliar's *Dicionário* as their starting point. One important reason, according to the authors, is the fact that Scliar compares the Brazilian culture with many others, which would allow learners to discuss not only "the other" culture, but also—and perhaps especially—their own (ix). The discussions proposed in the oral exercises are meant to elicit opinions about relevant topics and to provide tools for the development of coherent and cohesive texts (ix). Among these tools is the brief grammar review, as well as vocabulary and style exercises that can be carried out individually or in groups (xi). Even though the book is written in Brazilian Portuguese, the authors call attention to the European norm (even if briefly) when the two differ, for example in object pronoun placement (31).

Viajando através do alfabeto contains 26 chapters that correspond to the letters of the alphabet. The chapters are preceded by an "Introdução," which is divided into three parts and aims at introducing Scliar's book, as well as the work to be developed by learners. The third part in the "Introdução" asks learners to provide associations such as those used by Scliar for the title of each *crônica*. The authors propose that, letter by letter, students write their own *Dicionário*. With this goal in mind, instructors who wish to

adopt this book may consider using it in two consecutive terms, so that students have enough time to work on their *Dicionário* and instructors have enough time to review texts and provide suggestions for revisions.

Each chapter in *Viajando através do alfabeto* is organized as follows: a *crônica* that corresponds to the alphabet letter is followed by “Parte A: Desencadeando a fala antes da leitura,” “Parte B: Desencadeando a fala após a leitura,” and “Parte C: A estilística e a gramática com estilo,” which contains vocabulary and register exercises based on the chapter reading. Following the exercises in Partes A, B and C, each chapter brings brief grammar reviews with corresponding exercises. Then, figures of speech (*figuras de linguagem*)—two or three per chapter—are introduced. A brief “Prática” follows the definitions provided for the figures of speech, and the last exercise in each chapter asks students to write a text corresponding to the chapter’s letter (presumably picking up the titles they had created in “Introdução”).

It is not immediately clear why the pre-reading activities only appear after each *crônica*. Naturally, instructors would propose the questions in “Parte A” prior to assigning the reading. These questions (two per *crônica*) would work well for small-group discussion, whose conclusions may be reported to the whole class. Most questions in “Parte B” can be used in the same way, while the activities in “Parte C,” including very good vocabulary-expansion exercises, can be tackled either individually or in pairs or small groups.

The grammar-review section, as mentioned above, is normally short. Instructors may wish to add activities that allow for creative language use, perhaps as homework, since the grammar exercises in the book tend to be drills and fill-in-the-blanks. Some writing activity (e.g., short paragraphs) might help learners apply the grammar topic while preparing for the extended writing at the end of each chapter.

Introducing figures of speech seems very appropriate for advanced students who can use them in their original texts. Since Scliar’s *crônicas* are rich in figures of speech, the authors draw directly from the readings. After providing

definitions, they propose that learners identify figures of speech that appear in the *crônicas* and then write their own sentences. The extended writing exercise immediately follows the figure-of-speech practice, but there is no overt suggestion that the learners include those figures of speech in their texts (although that application seems to be implicit). To be sure that learners actually use them, instructors may wish to expand the directions for the writing practice. Learners might be instructed to include in their texts not only the figures of speech studied, but also the grammar points reviewed, especially if little or no extra grammar practice is provided.

As mentioned above, by the end of the book learners are supposed to have written their own *Dicionário do viajante insólito*, with their own “relatos de viagens, reais ou imaginárias” (xi). While this is an excellent idea for creative writing, learners may end up practicing only one writing style. Unless directions for the writing assignments are elaborated, learners may not have the opportunity to practice skills such as supporting arguments with relevant information, or to practice other styles, such as formal letter writing or journalistic writing (depending on the academic program, emphasis may be placed on one or several skills and/or styles). However, each writing exercise is open enough that instructors could mold them according to each group’s needs, thus providing the necessary practice for their academic program.

Viajando através do alfabeto helps to fill the void that exists in terms of advanced Portuguese language textbooks. It provides language practice while exploring cultural aspects of Brazil and many other places. The emphasis on comparison and contrast invites learners to think critically about their culture, an ability that cannot be overlooked in foreign language pedagogy.

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