

# **An Analysis of the Cultural Content of Six Portuguese Textbooks**

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**Abstract:** The treatment of culture in foreign language textbooks can have a significant impact on students' perceptions of other cultures. This study examined six current Portuguese textbooks for their treatment of a single cultural theme--food. The textbooks were examined in terms of the Cultures and Comparisons goal areas of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, as well the use of authentic texts, the attention given to the various regions where Portuguese is spoken, and the treatment of heterogeneity within Brazilian culture. Although the textbooks devoted considerable attention to Brazilian cultural products and practices, they lacked an emphasis on cultural perspectives and cross-cultural comparisons, and neglected to represent the viewpoints of the diverse groups that make up Brazilian society. Based on the findings of the study, several suggestions for enhancing the cultural content of textbooks are offered.

**Key words:** Culture, foreign language textbooks, Portuguese, *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*

In recent decades culture learning has come to be viewed as an integral part of language learning. The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* identify culture as one of five goal areas to be addressed, and a growing number of authors now assert that culture should be situated "at the core" of the curriculum (Paige, Lange, and Yershova; see also Byram and Morgan; Crawford-Lange and Lange; Galloway; Kramsch, *Context and Culture*; Young, *Standards Definition*). Although classroom practice may not have fully caught up with theory, few would dispute that culture learning should be an essential element of the foreign language curriculum.

Central to most foreign language curricula is the textbook used. The manner in which the textbook addresses cultural issues is especially important in light of the authority that both teachers and students ascribe to the text. Teachers may rely heavily on the cultural content of a textbook to compensate for their own lack of knowledge about the target culture, and even the most knowledgeable teachers often use the book as a primary resource because they lack the time to prepare their own materials. For students,

the textbook represents an authoritative source of information whose truth value often goes unquestioned:

“[Textbooks] present the language as it should be spoken and written by the learners, cultural information as it should be viewed and interpreted by the reader. The idea that a text could contain misprints or even errors is inconceivable for most learners. . . . The message it gives is: “Master the material between the covers and you will do well on the test and in real-life situations” (Kramsch, *Cultural Discourse* 66).

Given the trust placed in textbooks, as well as their influence in determining curricular content, the manner in which they address culture plays a key role in the culture learning of most foreign language students.

### **Culture in Foreign Language Textbooks, Past and Present**

In order to understand the way culture is presented in current foreign language textbooks, it may be helpful to briefly examine how textbooks’ treatment of culture has evolved over the past 75 years. Portuguese textbooks, being relatively few in number, have undoubtedly been influenced by the content of the many Spanish textbooks on the market, and hence we have included both Portuguese and Spanish textbooks in the following brief historical review.<sup>1</sup>

Although histories of foreign language education generally point to the 1960s as the decade when culture as “patterns of daily living” began to be emphasized (Allen 138; Heusinkveld xxvii; Morain 403), as early as the 1930s and 40s some textbooks in both Spanish and Portuguese were incorporating photographs and narratives about aspects of daily life in the target cultures (see, for example, Friedman, Arjona, and Carvajal;

Pereira). Other techniques for presenting cultural information, such as the use of authentic texts and songs from the target culture, came into use by at least the 1950s. One 1958 Spanish textbook (Jarrett) included cultural material that rivals that of textbooks today, including photos of Spanish speakers from various regions and ethnic groups; authentic texts such as cartoons, advertisements, weather reports, hotel dry cleaning forms, and short stories; sheet music for Latin American folk songs; and narratives on topics such as common Hispanic gestures, proper behavior for an American visiting Mexico, and Mexicans' perceptions of Americans. Not all books of the time emphasized culture, however; grammar-translation textbooks with little cultural content continued to be published well into the 1960s (e.g., Rossi; Willis).

In the 1960s and early 1970s most textbooks employed the audio-lingual method, which included an emphasis on dialogue memorization; and although the dialogues were designed to teach linguistic structures, some textbooks included cultural information in the dialogues or in accompanying notes. In addition, many audio-lingual textbooks began to include short cultural narratives (e.g., Hansen and Wilkins; Mujica and Segreda; MLA). These narratives generally consisted of one or more paragraphs about aspects of life in the target culture, written by the textbook authors. In the 1970s some of these cultural narratives began to reflect social issues such as ethnic diversity, problems associated with poverty, gender roles in Hispanic countries, and social equality (e.g. Neale-Silva and Nicholas; Woodford). Other techniques that were developed in the 1960s and 70s, such as the culture assimilator (e.g. Fiedler, Mitchell, and Triandis) and the cultural mini-drama (Gorden), have occasionally found their way into foreign language textbooks (e.g. Samaniego, Brown, Carlin, Gorman, and Sparks).

The abovementioned techniques for presenting cultural content continue to be used by textbooks today. Perhaps the most significant change in the past three decades has simply been the increased attention given to culture by nearly all textbooks. Most books now include an abundance of color photographs and often accompanying video segments depicting the life of young people in the target culture. In addition, some Spanish textbooks have begun to attend to the needs of heritage language learners in the U.S., with an accompanying emphasis on Chicano culture (e.g. Samaniego, Rojas, Ohara, and Alarcón).

### **The Profession's Recommendations for the Cultural Content of Textbooks**

One relatively recent factor impacting the cultural content of textbooks is the release of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, which specify culture as one of the goal areas to be addressed. The Cultures goal area of the *Standards* divides culture into three elements: practices (patterns of behavior such as gestures, greetings and leave-takings, holiday celebrations, and entertainment); products (books, food, songs, household items, and the like); and perspectives (beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and values). Of these three elements, it has been suggested that perspectives may play the most important role in helping students develop an appreciation of other cultures (Young, *Standards Definition* 20). Current models of culture learning (e.g., Bennett) posit that each culture has its own unique perspectives on human experience, and that in order for students to truly understand another culture, they must develop the ability to appreciate that culture's perspectives. Merely studying the practices and products of another culture without addressing the underlying perspectives yields only superficial cultural

understanding, and may lead students to form erroneous judgments about the culture. To cite just one example, North American students who are accustomed to grabbing a sandwich for lunch at work may be surprised to learn that Brazilians often take an hour off work to have lunch with colleagues (a cultural practice). The students may therefore conclude that Brazilians do not work as hard as Americans. An examination of the underlying cultural perspectives, however, might reveal that the pace of life is different in Brazil, or that Brazilians enjoy social interaction while eating, or that they simply place a high priority on eating complete meals. Understanding perspectives such as these can promote a more accurate perception of cultural practices and products.

An examination of the perspectives of the target culture (C2) should also lead students to examine their own cultural perspectives (C1), of which many students are unaware. The Comparisons goal area of the *Standards* specifies that learners are to “demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own” (Standard 4.2). Kramsch (*Cultural Discourse* 83) recommends that textbooks approach cultural comparisons by presenting information about both C1 and C2, as seen from both a C1 and a C2 perspective. Comparisons of this type can help students realize that their own worldview is influenced by the culture to which they belong, and that other cultures’ worldviews are equally valid.

In addition to the elements outlined in the Cultures and Comparisons goal areas of the *Standards*, a number of other elements that are desirable in a textbook’s treatment of culture have been identified. Ideally, a textbook should:

- Include a variety of authentic texts related to the cultural topics being studied (Young, *Processing Strategies* 451; *Standards Definition* 18).

- Provide information on diverse regions or countries where the target language is spoken (Ramirez and Hall 50).
- Depict the heterogeneity in cultures (regional, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, political, religious, etc.) through the visual images and voices represented in the text (Galloway 5; Elissondo 74).

On a more philosophical level, textbook authors must attend to a number of questions when considering the cultural content of their books. Kramersch (*Cultural Discourse* 67) has articulated some of these questions: Should the textbook address topics that are important to students in the C1, or those considered important in the C2? Which culture should be taught – that of the middle class, the working class, or the elite? Perhaps most importantly, how can textbooks truly reflect a C2 perspective when the books themselves are immersed in the educational culture of the C1, with all its norms about what constitutes acceptable content for textbooks and what does not? The way in which authors respond to these questions significantly influences the cultural messages that their books convey.

### **The Unique Case of Portuguese Textbooks**

Although a number of studies have examined the cultural content of beginning Spanish textbooks (Arizpe and Aguirre; Elissondo; Grosse and Uber; Ramirez and Hall; Young, *Standards Definition*), to date no known study has analyzed the treatment of culture in Portuguese textbooks.<sup>2</sup> The analysis of culture in Spanish textbooks is perhaps less problematic than in Portuguese textbooks, given the wider diversity in the conditions of the latter's production. Most beginning Spanish textbooks used in the United States are

produced domestically for the purpose of teaching Spanish as a foreign language and Hispanic cultures as foreign cultures. Many popular Portuguese textbooks, on the other hand, are published in Brazil or Portugal, and the view of culture that they present is that of the native Brazilian or Portuguese authors rather than that of North Americans, which often results in very different cultural content from that of books published in the U.S.

Another factor that complicates the analysis of culture in Portuguese textbooks is that unlike Spanish textbooks, few if any Portuguese textbooks are intended for use in K-12 classrooms in the U.S., inasmuch as Portuguese is rarely taught at that level. Rather, most Portuguese textbooks are designed either for use at U.S. universities or for teaching Portuguese as a second language to adolescents and adults in Brazil or Portugal. This being the case, Portuguese textbooks are free from many of the normative constraints imposed upon textbooks used in K-12 classrooms, such as the need for avoiding controversial topics and for appealing to a somewhat conservative audience (Ariew 12; Kramsch, *Cultural Discourse* 68). As a result, the treatment of culture in Portuguese textbooks tends to be more diverse than in Spanish textbooks.

### **The Present Study**

The present study aims to fill the gap in research on the cultural content of Portuguese textbooks. For the study we chose to examine six textbooks currently in use in Portuguese classrooms: *Brasil! Língua e cultura*; *Travessia*; *Avenida Brasil*; *Bem-Vindo!*; *Fala Brasil*; and *Falar...ler...escrever...Português*. The first two books are published in the U.S. and the latter four in Brazil. (Publication information for each book, as well as a summary of its cultural content, is listed in Appendix A<sup>3</sup>). Our selection of

these books should not be taken as indication of their quality or popularity; we have simply chosen them because of our familiarity with them, having used them in our own classrooms. As both of the authors have spent considerable time in Brazil (one of us is a native of Rio de Janeiro), all of the books emphasize Brazilian rather than Continental Portuguese, though we acknowledge that there are equally good textbooks published in Portugal that are used in U.S. classrooms (e.g. Leite and Coimbra). We have made every effort to obtain the most recent edition of each book, as well as any accompanying audio or video materials. Due to constraints on time and resources, however, we did not examine accompanying student workbooks or manuals.

## **Methodology**

To date, no specific methodology has been agreed upon for analyzing the cultural content of foreign language textbooks. Previous studies have employed various methods, such as examining the cultural topics addressed and the modes through which cultural information is conveyed (Grosse and Uber; Ramirez and Hall; Young, *Standards Definition*); analyzing the use of photographs to convey cultural information (Elissondo); and examining how certain ethnic groups in the target culture are portrayed (Arizpe and Aguirre). For the present study we chose to follow loosely the method used by Kramsch (*Foreign Language Textbooks*) in her study of German textbooks, analyzing each book for its treatment of a single cultural theme. The theme we selected was one that appeared in all six textbooks, that of food (including common Brazilian foods, eating habits, shopping for food, and eating out). Within this theme we examined each book for its treatment of seven criteria: practices, products, perspectives, cross-cultural comparisons,



use of authentic texts, geographic regions addressed, and depiction of the heterogeneity within cultures (see Appendix B for a complete statement of these criteria). For the first five criteria we analyzed in detail the content of the food-related sections of the six textbooks; for the last two criteria we looked beyond the food-related sections and examined the overall cultural content of the books. For each criterion we grouped the findings by theme and synthesized them in textual format. We then summarized the overall findings of the study and used them to generate a series of recommendations concerning the treatment of culture in Portuguese textbooks, and in foreign language textbooks in general.

Inasmuch as the first four criteria examined in the study (practices, products, perspectives, and comparisons) are taken from the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, we feel it necessary to acknowledge that it is somewhat unjust to analyze textbooks produced in Brazil in terms of the national standards of the United States. Nevertheless, given that the goal of the study was to examine the appropriateness of these books for use in the U.S., where the *Standards* are almost universally accepted, we felt it appropriate to include the *Standards* among our evaluation criteria for the study.

## **Findings**

### **Cultural Practices and Products**

Cultural practices and products are inseparably linked to each other. In order to fully understand the word *feijão*, for example, students need to know not only what *feijão* is (a cultural product) but also how, where, and when it is eaten and by whom (cultural practices). In the food-related sections that we examined in each of the six textbooks,

information about cultural practices and products was presented in five formats: vocabulary lists, recipes, menus, dialogues, and short narratives.

The main cultural product addressed in the textbook sections we examined was, of course, food. The vocabulary presented in all six books includes a variety of common Brazilian foods, including *arroz*, *feijão*, *salada*, *bife*, *feijoada*, and *farofa*, as well as common Brazilian fruits, vegetables, and beverages. Most of the books, however, offer no commentary on why these particular foods were selected for inclusion. It may seem obvious to teachers that these are foods commonly eaten in Brazil rather than in the U.S., but this fact may not be obvious to students. (One of the authors recalls his own experience learning Portuguese, wondering why the textbook listed such strange vegetables as watercress, kale, and chayote). Furthermore, without any context or explanation for vocabulary words, students may assume that “the world expressed by the foreign language is the same world as that of the native language, only with different labels attached” (Kramsch, *Cultural Discourse* 73). In the case of food products, for example, the mental image that a North American assigns to the word “beans” likely differs substantially from what Brazilian *feijão* looks like. One textbook, *Falar...ler...escrever...Português*, addresses this issue by providing small color photographs of many of the vocabulary items.

In addition to vocabulary lists, several of the textbooks address food as a cultural product through the use of menus or recipes. Three of the books contain authentic or simulated menus from Brazilian restaurants. These menus are useful for conveying an idea of the options available in a restaurant and what category they belong to (*aperitivos*, *guarnições*, *carnes*, *aves*, *peixes*, *bebidas*, *sobremesas*), but they offer little information

about specific menu items (with the exception of one video episode in *Travessia* in which a waiter explains the ingredients in several Bahian dishes to a customer). Furthermore, students have no way of judging the relative cultural importance of each menu item. (Is *cassata siciliana* as important to know as *pudim de leite*)? The same question applies to the recipes featured in two of the textbooks, which include *pavê tropical*, *chocolate cremoso*, *sanduíche aurora*, and *banana split*. Although one could easily imagine these recipes appearing in a Brazilian magazine or newspaper, in the absence of any contextual information students may conclude that banana splits are as common in Brazil as they are in the U.S., once again illustrating the importance of addressing cultural practices along with products.

The dialogues, due to the context they provide, furnish more information about the cultural practices associated with food. The dialogues in the textbooks take place in a variety of settings, including restaurants, *lanchonetes*, supermarkets, *feiras*, and Brazilian homes. From the *feira* dialogues a student may surmise that fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats may be purchased at a *feira*. The *lanchonete* dialogues suggest that sandwiches, juices, and soft drinks are available there, and the restaurant dialogues offer clues about the content of a multiple-course meal, as well as the practice of the waiter not bringing the check until the customers ask for it. Especially helpful are the dialogues that take place in Brazilian homes, which shed light on what an everyday meal might consist of. Inasmuch as the dialogues are rarely accompanied by any sort of commentary, however, students are left either to rely on the teacher for cultural explanations or to make their own assumptions about the cultural content of each dialogue.

One textbook, *Brasil! Língua e cultura*, addresses cultural practices and products

more explicitly than the other books through short narratives. Some of these narratives are written by the authors, while others, called *Vozes Brasileiras*, are taken from interviews with Brazilian university students. In relation to the theme of bakeries, for example, the authors explain what a *padaria* is and list some of the products that may be purchased there, as well as describing the products *pãozinho* and *bengala de pão* (as it is known in São Paulo). A young Brazilian is then quoted in a *Vozes Brasileiras* segment explaining that at least one *padaria* can be found in every neighborhood, and that the neighbors know what time the bread comes out of the oven so they can buy fresh, hot bread daily. This type of information is invaluable in helping students understand cultural products and practices.

### **Cultural Perspectives**

The *Standards* define perspectives as the attitudes, beliefs, and values of a culture, and stress the need for students to appreciate the perspectives of other cultures in order to understand their products and practices. If students make assumptions and draw conclusions about other cultures based solely on their own cultural perspectives, they are likely to make erroneous judgments and may eventually form negative attitudes toward members of those cultures (*Standards* 48).

None of the textbooks that we examined addresses cultural perspectives explicitly, although it could be argued that *Brasil! Língua e cultura* comes closer than other books by presenting enough information about practices and products that students may make their own inferences about the underlying perspectives. For example, having read that Brazilians often go out for lunch with colleagues from work and on weekends may spend

hours socializing with friends in restaurants or pizzerias, students might infer that Brazilians tend to value social interaction while eating. However, the book never explicitly invites students to make these types of inferences. Young (*Standards Definition*) arrived at a similar conclusion about the Spanish textbooks that she studied: they “fall short of achieving the affective goals learners and teachers value most, the aspect of culture that focuses on philosophical perspectives involving meaning, values, attitudes and ideas” (3). In our opinion, this is a significant shortcoming of current textbooks that needs to be addressed if students are to gain the type of insights that truly foster understanding and appreciation of other cultures.

### **Cross-Cultural Comparisons**

The *Standards* affirm that by comparing their own culture with other cultures, students can gain insight into the nature of culture itself. This insight can and should include an awareness in students of the way their own worldviews are influenced by their culture. According to Fantini, “awareness is in and of the *self* (and it is always about the self in relation to someone or something else). Hence, awareness is always *self-awareness*” (184; italics in original). Kramsch (*Cultural Discourse* 83) adds that in order for students to gain awareness both of their own culturally-influenced perspectives and those of the target culture, textbooks should present factual information about both C1 and C2, as seen from both a C1 and a C2 perspective.

When discussing cross-cultural comparisons it is helpful to distinguish between *second* language textbooks, such as those intended for teaching Portuguese to foreigners in Brazil, and *foreign* language textbooks, such as those written for teaching Portuguese

to students in the U.S. Second language textbooks are much more limited than foreign language textbooks in the amount of material they can present about students' C1, given that they must cater to learners from various cultural backgrounds rather than from a single culture. Nevertheless, second language textbooks can address cultural comparisons by asking the students themselves to serve as experts on their own culture, and then compare it with the target culture. One Brazilian textbook, *Falar...ler...escrever*, attempts to accomplish this by asking students to plan two typical Brazilian meals, with blanks to fill in for the *aperitivo, entrada, prato principal, bebida, sobremesa, e finalmente . . .* (one assumes that the *e finalmente* might refer to a *cafezinho*). The book then asks students to plan a typical meal from their own country based around the same courses. Unfortunately, the authors apparently assume that other countries' meals follow the same sequence and course structure as those in Brazil, which may not be the case. Furthermore, this is not the type of high-level comparison that is likely to lead students to new cultural insights (Kramsch, *Foreign Language Textbooks* 98). In this case a more productive comparison might be made between a Brazilian *almoço* eaten leisurely with one's family or colleagues from work, and a North American drive-through lunch from McDonald's eaten in one's car (to borrow an idea from Heusinkveld). Students could then be asked to form hypotheses about the cultural perspectives that underlie each set of products and practices.

Other than the abovementioned example in *Falar...ler...escrever*, none of the books includes activities that ask students to compare different cultural perspectives. This is partly because the perspectives presented are mainly those of the textbook authors. In the case of the four textbooks published in Brazil, the Brazilian authors present their own

view of Brazilian culture (a C2 view of C2).<sup>4</sup> In the two books published in the U.S., the principal views presented are apparently those of the American authors (a C1 view of C2), although both books make an effort to incorporate a Brazilian point of view as well. In *Travessia*, this is accomplished primarily through the use of authentic texts and video segments from Brazil. (The use of authentic texts is discussed in a subsequent section of this article.) In *Brasil! Língua e cultura*, a Brazilian perspective is conveyed through interviews with Brazilian university students in the *Vozes Brasileiras*. It is interesting to note, however, that in at least one case the views of the student interviewed are subordinated to those of the textbook authors. This occurs in a *Vozes Brasileiras* segment when a student states that leaving a tip in a restaurant is optional, but his comments are accompanied by a note from the authors affirming that “in truth it is not a good idea not to leave a tip” (207). In this case, at least, the authors implicitly establish their own perspective on C2 as the more valid one.

None of the books presents information about U.S. culture or attempts to involve students in thinking critically about their own culture. Again, we believe that these are areas needing increased attention in future textbooks.

### **Authentic Texts**

A number of authors have addressed the benefits of authentic texts in culture learning. Bacon and García both demonstrated how texts from newspapers and magazines may be used to illustrate cultural values, and Young (*Processing Strategies* 459) confirmed that such texts can be both easier to comprehend and more interesting than pedagogically simplified texts. Authors have not always agreed on how to define

“authentic.” For the present study we have adopted Swaffar’s broad definition that includes any text “whose primary intent is to communicate meaning” (17), whether intended for native speakers or language learners, as long as it is not intentionally simplified or subjected to deletions.

Of the textbooks that we examined, one book contains no authentic texts in the sections on food, and four books contain only one or two authentic texts in these sections. The remaining book, *Travessia*, is a clear standout in this respect with 15 authentic texts, including recipes, a restaurant menu, an article on safe food handling, a metric conversion chart, various advertisements for restaurants, and an article on fast food. All 15 texts are photographic reproductions of the original texts, which adds considerably to their value as cultural artifacts. These texts are rich in cultural content; for instance, an ad for a Bahian restaurant offers “*acarajé, abará, bobó, sarapatel, . . . e tudo mais que v. pode imaginar que exista no tabuleiro de uma baiana,*” and adds that “*o único defeito do nosso restaurante é que o cozinheiro é homem*” (*Travessia* 451). This cultural allusion to a Bahian woman sitting on a street corner and selling typical foods from a large tray would be familiar to most Brazilians, and could serve as the basis for a wonderful lesson on *comida baiana*. Unfortunately, the textbook offers no explanation of these cultural elements in conjunction with the advertisement. This particular ad, along with more than half of the authentic texts in the chapter, is simply inserted in the book with no introduction or commentary, making it unlikely that students would understand the cultural references unless they were explained by the teacher.

Of the remaining authentic texts in *Travessia*’s food units, two are followed by comprehension questions, but the questions focus on a literal interpretation of the text



rather than on its cultural content. With the addition of some brief cultural explanations, photographs, or questions related to culture, the value of these texts as culture learning resources could be greatly enhanced.

An additional type of authentic text that often receives little attention in beginning textbooks is literary texts, including *crônicas*, short stories, and poetry. One book, *Fala Brasil*, contains a *crônica* by Carlos Drummond de Andrade entitled “No restaurante,” a delightful story about a four-year-old girl who insists on ordering lasagna despite her father’s attempts to persuade her otherwise. Although the textbook provides no introduction or commentary on the story, this seems like an ideal opportunity to introduce students to the genre of the *crônica*, including an explanation of its characteristics, a comparison with other *crônicas*, and opportunities for students to look for similar genres in their native language.

### **Regions / Countries Where Portuguese is Spoken**

Ramirez and Hall, in their study of five Spanish textbook series, found that Mexico and Spain together accounted for 37% of the cultural references in the books, leaving the other 18 Spanish-speaking countries “underrepresented” (63). They also concluded that none of the books contained a significant representation of Spanish-speaking groups living in the U.S. The implication, of course, is that textbooks should expose students to a variety of countries and communities where the target language is spoken. In Portuguese textbooks this could include attention to various regions within Brazil or Portugal as well as to other Lusophone countries (Angola, Cabo Verde, Guiné Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe). Admittedly it may not be practical to devote equal time to each

region or country, given the fact that Portuguese teachers must usually select one variety of the language to emphasize. We believe, however, that students benefit from even a short exposure to different Lusophone regions, if only to be aware that each has its own unique Portuguese-speaking culture.

In order to assess this criterion it was necessary to look beyond the food-related sections and examine the contents of each textbook in their entirety. Inasmuch as all six books focus on Brazilian culture, we first examined their treatment of cultural variation from one region of Brazil to another. Of the six books, *Brasil! Língua e cultura* and *Travessia* devote the most attention to the various regions of Brazil. *Brasil! Língua e cultura* features a chapter each on São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasília, with numerous *Vozes Brasileiras* in which college students talk about the unique aspects of each city and points of interest that they would take a tourist to visit. *Travessia* features a unit on each of the five regions of Brazil (*Norte, Nordeste, Sudeste, Centro-Oeste, and Sul*), including video segments and narratives about the history and defining characteristics of each region. Especially interesting are the video segments of documentaries about the people who live and work on the Amazon and São Francisco rivers. Although the other four books are not organized around specific regions of Brazil, most of them contain short narratives about different regions or cities.

The six books are less uniform in their treatment of Lusophone cultures outside Brazil, with only three of the books containing information on these cultures. *Bem-Vindo!*, *Avenida Brasil*, and *Travessia* each feature one or more units that focus collectively on Portugal and the African Lusophone countries, including maps of each country, historical and demographic information, and songs. Additionally, *Bem-Vindo!*

contains a text about *A Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa*, and *Avenida Brasil* features a segment of an interview with José Saramago (a Portuguese author) and a short story by Luís Bernardo Honwana (an author from Mozambique). Both books also contain short lists of lexical differences between Brazil and Portugal and audio examples of pronunciation differences (although one recording in *Bem-Vindo!* is evidently of a Brazilian speaker imitating a Portuguese accent). The other three books make little if any mention of Lusophone countries other than Brazil. None of the six books contains information about Portuguese-speaking communities in the U.S.

### *Heterogeneity Within Cultures*

Galloway emphasizes that the political borders of countries do not confine people into a single homogeneous group (5). Individuals within each country vary in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language use, occupation, political and religious affiliations, and in countless other ways. Although learners are often aware of the heterogeneity within their own culture, they may view other cultures as relatively homogeneous, which can be an impediment to deeper cross-cultural understanding. The visual images that textbooks portray in photographs and drawings, and the voices they represent in the dialogues and narratives, convey implicit messages about how the diverse groups within the target culture differ from one another, and how they are viewed by each other.

To assess the treatment of cultural heterogeneity we examined both the overall cultural content of each textbook and the sections devoted specifically to food. In terms of overall cultural content, the books generally depict Brazil as a racially and ethnically

diverse nation. Ethnic diversity is portrayed in three of the books through narratives about 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century immigrants, including Italians, Germans, and Japanese. Two books address racial diversity in terms of Afro-Brazilian culture, particularly that of Bahia; both *Travessia* and *Brasil! Língua e cultura* contain narratives about *comida baiana* and *capoeira*, and the latter book also contains a narrative called “Brasil: Multicultural, Multiracial.” *Falar...ler...escrever*, contains a narrative called *Os índios do Brasil*. Most of the textbooks contain photographs and drawings (or video segments, in the case of *Travessia*) featuring Brazilians of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds.

In terms of socioeconomic status, *Brasil! Língua e cultura* and *Avenida Brasil* both devote attention to income-based differences among various groups in Brazilian society. *Brasil! Língua e cultura* contains narratives and interviews about the contrast between the rich and the poor in Rio de Janeiro, including articles and photographs of *favelas*. *Avenida Brasil* contains short interviews with Brazilians from various occupations and socioeconomic levels, including a teacher, a maid, a student, a *favelado*, an actress, a tour guide, a banker, and an architect. In one exercise the book shows several photographs of individual Brazilians and asks students to try to imagine their socioeconomic level, their profession, and what education they have had, as well as their possible abilities and intellectual qualities.

The textbooks depict the heterogeneity within Brazilian culture in various other ways as well. Several of the books feature information about famous Brazilians such as Xuxa, Guga, Chico Buarque de Hollanda, and Caetano Veloso, sometimes including stories of their life experiences. *Avenida Brasil* contains an article about the increasing role of women in the professional world. And *Bem-Vindo!* contains short narratives about

well-known regional types such as *caipiras*, *gaúchos*, *sertanejos*, and *caboclos*.

Although some of the textbooks present a considerable amount of information about the diverse groups that make up Brazilian society, it is interesting to note that this information is generally presented from the point of view of the textbook authors rather than of members of the groups themselves. With the exception of the abovementioned short interviews with Brazilians of different backgrounds featured occasionally in some of the books, the preferred method of addressing racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity seems to be through third-person narratives written by the authors. Even *Brasil! Língua e cultura*, which features numerous interviews with young Brazilians about various topics, falls short of representing diverse points of view; all of the people interviewed in the book are university students, who represent a relatively small segment of the Brazilian population. Furthermore, little or no information is given about the race, ethnicity, or even gender of most of the students interviewed.

The lack of diversity in the points of view represented is especially apparent in the food-related sections of most of the books. In general, the individuals depicted in these sections seem to fall into two groups. The first group consists of consumers – those who eat in restaurants, shop in large supermarkets, or order *feijoada* delivered to their homes. The second group consists of workers, including waiters in restaurants, *feirantes*, butchers, and supermarket employees. The distinction between the two groups is most evident in the dialogues between the customers purchasing food and the workers who attend to them. In all six books the points of view presented are those of the first group of people; nowhere are the second group's viewpoints represented. In *Brasil! Língua e cultura*, the university students interviewed talk about going out to eat but say nothing

about having jobs, and are thus implicitly identified as consumers rather than workers.

In the absence of the viewpoints of members of different social classes, North American students may assume that social roles and relationships are the same in Brazil as they are in the United States. American students who work as waiters, supermarket clerks, or bartenders, for example, may presume that it is common for college students in Brazil to hold similar jobs, which in our experience is not usually the case. This misperception is likely to persist unless the voices of people who represent the working class are included in some way. The same holds true for individuals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds; unless their voices are included, textbooks run the risk of presenting a rather one-sided view of Brazilian culture.

#### Discussion

On the whole, culture learning seems to be a priority of the textbooks analyzed in this study. In relation to the topic of food, most of the books devote a substantial amount of space to presenting cultural information, including lists of common Brazilian foods, menus, recipes, photographs, and dialogues. These elements undoubtedly go a long way toward giving North American students a “taste” of Brazilian culture. Without detracting from the cultural content of these books, we would like to offer a few suggestions based on the findings of this study as to how students’ culture learning could be further enhanced.

In terms of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, most of the cultural information presented in the textbooks deals with cultural products, and to a lesser extent, cultural practices. None of the books emphasizes cultural perspectives or asks students to

make meaningful cross-cultural comparisons of the type that foster an appreciation of other cultures' worldviews. We believe this is an area needing increased attention in future textbooks.

Galloway offers an example of how cultural perspectives and comparisons can be addressed in a unit on food. She outlines a series of lessons for a Spanish class in which students first examine their own eating habits by listing the foods they have eaten for the past two days and the factors that influenced what they ate and when. They then compare the U.S. food pyramid with the Latin American and Mediterranean food pyramids in terms of the foods that are recommended and those that are actually eaten on a daily basis in each culture. Next, they research topics related to food in a Spanish-speaking country, including food-related proverbs, traditional dishes, prices and shopping habits, and mealtime and snacking patterns (the teacher provides students with websites related to each topic). Finally, students undertake a summative task such as proposing a new menu item for a U.S. fast-food franchise that is expanding into a Spanish-speaking country, and preparing an ad for the item that will appeal to members of the local culture. Activities such as this could easily be incorporated into a textbook chapter on food, giving students the opportunity to think about the perspectives that underlie cultural products and practices in the target culture as well as in their own.

In terms of authentic texts, only one of the textbooks contains a significant number of authentic texts related to food. Given the rich cultural content of many authentic texts, as well as the relative ease with which they can be located on the Internet or in magazines or newspapers, it would not be difficult for textbook authors (or teachers) to find a variety of texts related to nearly any cultural topic. In a unit on food, for example, these texts

might include supermarket ads, product labels from foods, restaurant reviews from newspapers, articles on dieting, or even solicitations for donations to food pantries. Textbook authors could supplement these texts with explanations or comprehension questions related to their cultural content, as well as activities that involve students in making cross-cultural comparisons. For example, students could be asked to examine the prices of food items on a restaurant menu and think about which groups in Brazilian society could afford to eat out regularly, based on information about Brazilian income levels and minimum wage obtained from the Internet. They could then compare this information with their knowledge of North Americans' income levels and restaurant-going habits, and form hypotheses about differences in cultural practices and the reasons for them. As an extension of this activity, students might verify their hypotheses through correspondence with pen pals or key pals in Brazil.

With respect to the regions addressed, only three of the textbooks include information about Lusophone countries other than Brazil, and none of the books addresses Portuguese-speaking groups living in the United States. Too often in foreign language textbooks and classes, the target culture is viewed as existing only in foreign countries, when in fact there are sizable groups of native speakers of the target language in students' own communities. For example, Massachusetts alone is home to nearly 160,000 native Portuguese speakers, and California and New Jersey each have more than 70,000 ([http://www.mla.org/census\\_data](http://www.mla.org/census_data)). By including information on these groups of people, Portuguese textbooks (particularly those published domestically) could help encourage students' interest in their Portuguese-speaking neighbors, what brought them to the U.S., and what their life is like here.



Finally, with respect to cultural heterogeneity, we believe that the textbooks in this study could be enriched by devoting increased attention to the voices of Brazilians representing different social classes, regions, races, ethnicities, and ages. A unit on food, for example, could feature interviews with waiters, butchers, bakers, or *feirantes*, as well as with shoppers and restaurant customers. The points of view thus expressed would furnish a much more complete picture of the diverse groups that make up Brazilian society.

We close with an observation by Seelye:

In the final analysis, no matter how technically dexterous a student's training in the foreign language, if the student avoids contact with native speakers of that language and lacks respect for their world view, of what value is the training? Where can it be put to use? What educational breadth has it inspired? (21).

We believe that by giving careful consideration to their cultural content, foreign language textbooks can go a long way toward increasing students' understanding and respect for other cultures' worldviews, and thus contribute to one of the principal aims of foreign language education.

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## Appendix A

### Textbooks Analyzed in This Study

Coudry, P., & Fontão, E. *Fala Brasil: Português para estrangeiros* (4<sup>a</sup> Ed.). Campinas: Pontes Editores, 1993.

*Fala Brasil* has the objective of preparing students to communicate in everyday situations in Brazil. The text is divided into 15 units organized around situational language use, language functions, and grammar principles. The communicative situations, which include shopping at the *feira*, making telephone calls and arranging transportation, are presented in the form of short dialogues accompanied by drawings of the people involved. With the exception of several dialogues in which a Brazilian couple shows slides of their travels throughout Brazil and comment on each region, as well as an appendix listing national holidays, important dates in Brazilian history, and an outline of the Brazilian educational system, the text contains little explicit cultural information. Rather, culture is presented implicitly through the communicative situations themselves, “thereby avoiding boring texts” (authors’ introduction). In addition, the book contains several *crônicas* and the lyrics to popular songs that contain references to some cultural concepts, although these concepts are not pointed out explicitly.

Lathrop, T., & Dias, E. M. *Brasil! Língua e cultura* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). Newark, DE: LinguaText, 2002.

*Brasil! Língua e Cultura* aims to prepare American students to “take a trip to Brazil and get along fine in [their] day-to-day activities.” The book’s cultural content emphasizes college life in São Paulo, but also addresses other geographical regions, as well as a wide variety of cultural topics ranging from *favelas* to *o jogo do bicho*. The book’s 20 lessons are organized around these cultural topics. Each lesson contains several short transcriptions taken from interviews with Brazilian university students about the cultural topic at hand, called *vozes brasileiras*. Additional cultural information is given in short paragraphs called *notas culturais*, presumably written by the authors. Toward the end of each lesson is a dialogue relating the experiences of Scott Davis, an American student studying at the Universidade de São Paulo. Each lesson also contains a variety of color photographs and drawings of people, places, and things in Brazil.

Lima, E. E. O. F., & Iunes, S. A. *Falar...ler...escrever...Português*. São Paulo: Editora , 1999.

Pedagógica e Universitária.

*Falar...ler...escrever...Português* is designed for a “público estrangeiro” consisting of “adultos e também adolescentes a partir de 13 anos aproximadamente, de qualquer nacionalidade.” The text is divided into 18 units, each of which begins with a dialogue centered upon everyday situations such as ordering a meal, renting an apartment, or purchasing a newspaper at a newsstand. The dialogues are



accompanied by drawings of the people involved. Each unit also contains a *texto narrativo*, presumably written by the authors, that comments on various regions of Brazil as well as other topics such as natural resources, Brazilian history, and the pollution of the Rio Tietê in São Paulo. The later units also contain a number of authentic or pseudo-authentic texts, including poetry, *crônicas*, and letters to an advice columnist. The text also features black-and-white and color photographs of Brazilians in everyday situations, tourist attractions in Brazil, and vocabulary items such as food and clothing.

Lima, E. E. O. F., Rohrmann, L., Ishihara, T., Bergweiler, C. G., & Iunes, S. A. *Avenida Brasil: Curso básico de Português para estrangeiros*. São Paulo: Editora Pedagógica e Universitária, 1992.

*Avenida Brasil* consists of two volumes intended for use in first- and second-level courses. The text targets “estrangeiros de qualquer nacionalidade, adolescentes e adultos que quieram aprender Português para poderem comunicar-se com os brasileiros e participar de sua vida cotidiana.” Each volume is divided into 10-12 units centered around cultural topics, beginning with communicative situations (becoming acquainted, ordering food, getting a hotel room) and progressing to more theoretical topics such as politics, the economy, folklore, and the media. Each unit contains dialogues based on communicative situations, accompanied by drawings. The text also contains black-and-white and color photographs of people and places in Brazil, and a variety of authentic or pseudo-authentic texts related to the topics being studied, including letters to the editor, newspaper articles, advertisements, and

*crônicas.*

Ponce, M. H. O., Burim, S. R. B. A., & Florissi, S. (2000). *Bem-Vindo! A língua portuguesa no mundo da comunicação* (2<sup>a</sup> Ed.). São Paulo: Special Book Services.

*Bem-Vindo!* is apparently geared toward foreigners studying Portuguese in Brazil. Although its focus is mainly on communicative situations (work, restaurant, school, etc.), it aims to include “um pouco da História, cultura e sociedade brasileiras.” The text is organized into 18 units, loosely categorized into five groups: *Eu e você*, *O Brasil e sua língua*, *A sociedade e sua organização*, *O trabalho e suas características*, and *Diversão-Cultura*. One of the defining characteristics of the book is the brightly-colored drawings and photographs on every page. Other cultural content consists of situational dialogues, pedagogically-prepared cultural readings on topics ranging from bairros to regional stereotypes, and authentic texts, which consist mainly of short articles apparently edited from magazines and newspapers, but also of other texts such as faxes, business letters, and phone messages.

Tolman, J. M., Paiva, R. M., Jensen, J. B., & Parsons, N. P. *Travessia: A video-based Portuguese textbook*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1993.

*Travessia* bills itself as a “video-based textbook” that aims to teach “the Portuguese language and Luso-Brazilian culture.” The text is divided into two volumes intended to correspond to first- and second-year courses. Each volume consists of six units organized thematically around various regions of Brazil, as well as a chapter on Portugal and one on Africa. Each unit begins with a map of the

region being studied and a short video segment about that region. Additional explanations about the region, as well as about diverse cultural topics such as *samba* and *comida baiana*, are given in the form of textual explanations, apparently written by the authors. The book contains a wide variety of authentic texts, including advertisements, menus, telegrams, horoscopes, comic strips, and *crônicas*, each of which is followed by comprehension questions. Video materials include pedagogically-prepared skits by professional Brazilian actors and songs performed by popular Brazilian musicians. The final unit is based on six episodes from a *telenovela*. The text also includes extensive lists of vocabulary and dialogues that center on common communicative situations.

## Appendix B

### Criteria for Evaluating the Cultural Content of Foreign Language Textbooks

To what extent does the textbook . . .

1. Provide opportunities for students to learn about the practices of the target culture?
2. Provide opportunities for students to learn about the products of the target culture?
3. Provide opportunities to think about the cultural perspectives (values, beliefs, priorities) associated with practices and products?
4. Provide opportunities for students to compare the perspectives of the target culture with their own, and gain insight into their own culture?
5. Include a variety of authentic texts from the target culture?
6. Provide information on diverse regions/countries where the target language is spoken?
7. Depict the heterogeneity in cultures (regional, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, political, religious, etc.) through the visual images and voices represented in the text?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Special thanks are due to Professor James S. Taylor for his collection of Spanish and Portuguese textbooks from the past 75 years, which provided the basis for this brief historical review.

<sup>2</sup>Jernigan and Moore (1997) examined the teaching of culture in Portuguese classrooms, but their study focused on teachers rather than textbooks.

<sup>3</sup>Although two of the textbooks in the study were written by some of the same authors, the books are different enough that we felt it desirable to include them both.

<sup>4</sup>We refer here to U.S. culture as C1 and Brazilian culture as C2, inasmuch as Brazilian culture is the target culture for students studying Portuguese in

