INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON
"L1 STUDIES IN BRAZIL"

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This special issue of *L1–Educational Studies in Language and Literature* brings a sample of the research which has been done in Brazil regarding L1 teaching and learning. The articles gathered here were selected from presentations made at the 4th SIGET (International Symposium on Genre Studies), which took place at the University of Southern Santa Catarina (UNISUL), Brazil, in August 2007.

In the last two decades, the concept of genre has taken an important role in the renewal of the debate on L1 education at elementary and high school levels, as well as at the universities. Thus in many countries there has been a change in the practices of mother tongue teaching, which started to be based on empirical genres and no longer on abstract grammatical rules. In Brazil, this change of approach towards language teaching was especially marked by the publication of the National Curricular Parameters – (PCNs in Portuguese) by the Ministry of Education (BRAZIL, 1998). This document is based on concepts of genre and discourse proposed by Bakhtin (1992; Bakhtin & Volochinov, 1990), and on discussions about education led by various Brazilian and foreign authors, especially Bronckart and his colleagues (Bronckart et al. 1985; Dolz & Schneuwly, 1996; Schneuwly, 1993), Franchi (1987, 1992), Geraldi (1984, 1993), Kaufman and Rodriguez (1995), and Vygotsky (1990). In general terms, the PCNs reshaped not only the teaching focus (its contents), but also the way language is taught at Brazilian schools, since they propose the teaching of L1 along two basic axes: "usage" (the practice of listening and reading texts; and

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the practice of producing oral and written texts); and "reflection" (the practice of linguistic analysis).

Currently in Brazil research on L1 teaching presents a mosaic of perspectives, including the systemic-functional approach proposed by Halliday; the Bakhtinian cycle of dialogism; the new rhetoric of American and Canadian orientation; and the socio-discursive interactionism proposed by Bronckart and his colleagues. In this scenario, the group that works within the latter perspective has become one of the most productive and influential, as the set of works published in the present edition indicate. It should be remembered, however, that although there are more or less defined groups, the debate on L1 teaching in Brazil is very much open and there are many points of mutual collaboration and exchange.

Currently, as L1 teaching focuses on communicative interaction, there are no clear distinctions among research objects as there used to be. Within this teaching approach writing, reading and grammar are taught jointly, based on the students' practices, and no longer as separate topics. As a consequence, research on the teaching and learning of Portuguese always involves a multiplicity of objects of knowledge. The way a particular object is designated depends on the researcher's viewpoint and on her/his research design.

This context makes it difficult to produce an exhaustive list of the themes explored by research on L1 teaching in Brazil. Nevertheless, in the present issue we have tried to point these themes out based on the analysis of a number of collections of articles recently published in Brazil (Rojo, 2000; Dionísio, Machado & Bezerra, 2002; Ribeiro, 2004; Cristóvão & Nascimento, 2005; Bonini & Furlanetto, 2006; Bunzen & Mendonça, 2006; Karwoski, Gaydeczka & Brito, 2006; Kleiman & Baltar, 2008). According to this survey, the most common objects of discussion in this area are:

1) genre structures and the social practices related to them. (These research studies provide necessary background for curriculum design, student guidance and student motivation);
2) practices and techniques of teaching-learning, with particular emphasis on: a) teaching-learning of text production; b) teaching-learning of reading; c) teaching-learning of grammar. (This last item has been less focused on lately, at least within the perspective of genre-based teaching);
3) teaching materials, with special emphasis on: a) course books; and b) new media;
4) genres and teaching practices;
5) genres and teacher identity;
6) public policies on L1 teaching.

In general terms, this special issue on L1 education in Brazil brings together theoretical reflections and results of experiments in language teaching, within the perspective of a socially situated learning related to the genre-based approach to education. Moreover, compared to traditional linguistic education, the articles presented in this issue enable us to see the emergence of new theoretical objects and new ways of teaching.

The first of these articles, "The use of didactic sequences and the teaching of L1: An analysis of an institutional program of teaching writing at school," by Vera Cris-

tovão, presents an analysis of a social intervention program of (proposed by an NGO), which aims to promote new ways of teaching reading and writing at school. Cristovão, considering the texts produced by students within this project, focuses her analysis on successful and unsuccessful aspects related to the implementation of the didactic sequence proposed by the instructional materials that are part of this project.

Ana Maria Guimarães, in her article "Genre teaching in different social environments: An experiment with the genre detective story," compares the results of the implementation of a didactic sequence to teach the detective story genre in two different educational environments. One of the highlights of this article is how the author conceives the assessment of pupils' learning, using, as parameters, the genre characteristics which were emphasized in the teaching experience. This is a procedure that, balancing qualitative and quantitative aspects, allows the emergence of a very practical view of what the students have learned.

The construction of a school radio is the theme of the third article, "School radio: Socio-discursive interaction tool in the school," by Marcos Baltar, Maria Eugênia Gastaldello and Marina Camelo. In Brazil, the notion of "working projects" has been frequently limited to the development of practices that are restricted only to themes. This article, however, allows us to see the benefits of implementing a work project which goes beyond the mere treatment of specific topics, as the experience reported sought to put the students into a real situation of social interaction through the production of radio programs.

In "Developing writing skills through the use of blogs," Socorro Cláudia Sousa and Maria Elias Soares report a teaching experience which, as in the previous article, also sought to put students in a real situation of social interaction. In this sense, it is very interesting to notice how this experience with a blog, if compared with the school radio, brings out a wholly different situation of linguistic interaction to the students and, thus, a different scenario of L1 education.

The fifth and last article, "Shaping meanings through genre: An analysis of a personal experience narrative in a graduate course", by Adriana Kuschnir, focuses on the occurrence of personal experience narrative as a genre embedded in the classroom discourse. This research shows how, in the context of graduate courses, the personal narratives can become a teaching tool and therefore performs an important role in the students' social construction of knowledge.

The articles assembled in this issue, as a whole, may be useful in three ways. Firstly, they feed the theoretical debate about L1 teaching as they compile research data from an innovative perspective. Secondly, they serve as examples of the implementation of new guidelines for L1 teaching in Brazil. This second aspect is of great importance–as it is still difficult for both researchers in the academia and school teachers to determine how best to implement genre-based teaching, though the research studies reported here have provided evidence on the feasibility of this approach. A third benefit of this issue is the fact that it provides a small, but expressive, sample of what is currently being done in terms of language education in a specific country, Brazil in this case.

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