

A Spanish Speaker Learning Portuguese: Different Settings, Different Voices

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1. Introduction

Current debates in foreign language education can be concisely summarized in Dewey's (1990 [1900]: 56) words: "There is all the difference in the world between having something to say and having to say something." Consequently, helping learners develop their own voices in a foreign language is a key issue in our field, no matter what goals, methods, resources, or other conditions are associated with the profession.

In order to guide students in this development, it is essential that practitioners possess a thorough understanding of learners' discourses, encompassing not only *what* these individuals produce, but also the contextual features attached to this production and the broader implications of these issues altogether. Yet many studies on the development of Portuguese by Spanish speakers have been informed by research traditions which associate the learner, as well as the learning process, with individual characteristics, neglecting (or at best minimizing) the relevance of the sociohistorical conditions in which language development takes place (Vygostky 1978, Lantolf 2000). As a consequence, linguistic production in this scenario has often been described as a simple, univocal object of analysis immune to the impact of contextual features involving, for example, the setting, participants' goals and interactional roles, the co-text, paralinguage—not to mention the very influence of the ever-unfolding interaction which necessarily impinges upon this production.

This paper draws upon Goffman's (1981: 128) concept of footing, "the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance." It is also framed by the Bakhtinian notion of voice, "the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness [that] always has a will or desire behind it" (Holquist 1981: 434) and whose language is "populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others." (Bakhtin 1981: 294) With these notions in mind, our purpose is to challenge the notion of uniformity of meaning in a learner's discourse. We conducted a case study with a Spanish speaker learning Portuguese, and here we discuss the extent to which a learner's voice varies within and across three different settings: (i) in the more controlled, institutionalized scenario of the language class at a university; (ii) in a more flexible (but still controlled by one participant) arena of conversation clubs provided by the same university; and (iii) in more informal, less controlled interviews with one of the researchers. Specifically, we analyze the learner's articulation of questions and conclude that the learner constructs different footings and develops various voices in her process of learning Portuguese as a foreign language.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 outlines the methodology and the settings for data collection. Section 3 defines key concepts in this work and suggests that similar utterances may reflect different positionings taken up towards the utterance and towards others in interaction. Section 4 expands these arguments by illustrating how the learner's discourse can display the articulation of various voices. Section 5 explores how the learner articulates questions in different settings, and discusses how these questions relate to the points developed in Sections 3 and 4. Conclusions are offered in the final section.

2. Context and methodology

Our data come from audiotape recordings of a learner of Portuguese whose first language is (Peninsular) Spanish. The learner, Gloria¹, a graduate student, was enrolled in a beginning Portuguese for Spanish speakers course. The recordings were done in the Portuguese classroom, at conversation

tables, and during interviews with one of the researchers. We have a total of about 11 hours of recordings, which were transcribed according to the conventions in the Appendix.

The university-level Portuguese course in which Gloria was enrolled had a total of 20 students. The classroom followed a traditional spatial arrangement, with students facing the professor and not moving from their desks (or moving their desks) during the class. The drill exercises used in class were conducted in Portuguese, but interactions between the professor and the students (such as explanations, questions, or tales) tended to happen in English. The classroom interactions predominantly followed a T-S-T-S (teacher-student) pattern and often displayed IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) moves; in our data, we did not attest interaction among students in the target language.

The conversation tables were attended by one to four students. The tables were led by a native speaker of Brazilian Portuguese, and the interactions were in the target language. In general, the conversation was about a pre-selected theme (e.g., Valentine's day), and included the presentation and discussion of vocabulary related to that theme. If only Gloria attended, the conversation did not follow a prepared theme. The conversation tables took place in a room that had two sofa-like seats (for two/three people) and a few chairs, distributed as in a living room. All the participants were able to maintain eye contact while talking.

The interviews were conducted in the office of one of the researchers and lasted about 20 to 30 minutes each. Questions were asked about Gloria's opinion of her own learning process, about her own Portuguese production in the different settings, and whether she thought her knowledge of Spanish helped (or hindered) that process.

3. Key concepts

Before we go on to discuss whether the analysis of the questions articulated by the learner in three different settings reveals also different footings and voices (within and across settings), it is important to point out that "questions," as one type of utterance, do not involve purely referential functions aiming at the exchange of information. When questions are asked, it is important to note that the utterer is also signalling important messages at minimally two other levels, namely the interpersonal (how she positions herself towards co-interactants) and the textual (how she positions herself towards the very utterance). Goffman's (1981) notion of participant status addresses this latter issue well: according to it, "speakers" (in its canonical sense) may hold three positions or *participation statuses* in relation to the utterance: *animator* (the one who physically articulates the utterance), *author* (the one who creates the articulated words), and *principal* (the one who is responsible for the sentiments/ideas expressed).

Similarly, Jakobson (1960), points out that participants in interaction should not be described as speakers/hearers but rather as senders, addressers, addressees, and receivers. Santos (in prep), discussing language textbooks, maintains that textbook senders (authors, publishers, etc.) must be distinguished from those who "address" these texts in the classroom. Moreover, she argues, when teachers and students rearticulate these texts in their own discourses, it is impossible to make this distinction between "addressers" and "senders" with precision. Santos' claim can be related to Bakhtin's (1981) notion of language being populated with the intentions of others: what is said is not only what the speaker intends, but carries with it features that relate to other individuals (involved or not in the interaction), other utterances, and broader social issues as well.

The points discussed so far in this section are illustrated below (Examples 1 and 2). Both involve questions (see highlighted words) articulated by the learner on different occasions, in different settings. We will argue that, in spite of various similarities between these two questions (e.g. both are articulated by the same individual, both involve interrogative clauses, both clauses are polar, both share thematic content), they display different participant statuses and therefore have distinct consequences vis-à-vis the development of the learner's voice(s) in the target language.

(1) Class 1/21/032

S: Mariana, você está com sono? Sim, está com sono.

T: Now, he's using *você*, ok? He's saying, Mariana, are you with sono, so you're Mariana, ok, so the answer is, sim.

S: Estou.

T: Estou com sono. I think that's what they're looking for here, ok? Yes, ok? Alright. Gloria, come back up to number six, will you please? Ele?

G: **Ele é garçom? É, e agora está no restaurante.**

T: OK? Ele é garçom? É, e agora está, right? Ok? Alright. Ah, vocês.

S: Vocês... uh, são.. são estran—estrangeiros?

T: Uh-hm. Give me a nice big vowel.

S: Estran—estrangeiro.

S: Mariana, are you sleepy? Yes, (she) is sleepy.

T: Now, he's using você, ok? He's saying, Mariana, are you with sono, so you're Mariana, ok, so the answer is, yes.

S: I am.

T: I am sleepy. I think that's what they're looking for here, ok? Yes, ok? Alright. Gloria, come back up to number six, will you please? He?

G: Is he a waiter? Yes, and now he is at the restaurant.

T: OK? Is he a waiter? Yes, e agora *está*, right? Ok? Alright. Ah, you.

S: You... uh, are.. are for—foreigners?

T: Uh-hm. Give me a nice big vowel.

S: For—foreigners.

The interaction exemplified in (1) reinforces Dewey's (1990 [1900]) idea, quoted in the introduction. Gloria has to say something, because she is prompted by the teacher. However, the words that she utters are those that the teacher (and also probably the textbook authors) expect: given a prompt, she "fills in the blank" with the correct verb. In Goffmanian terms, Gloria is not the author of what she says, but merely animates what is said in the textbook. As a result, she positions herself in relation to the teacher as a less-powerful interactant who needs confirmation regarding the adequacy of her words. Furthermore, the question she articulates loses the information-seeking status it would probably have in conversational scenarios, and gains here special overtones: it emphasizes form over content, and thus triggers a response that focuses on form as well.

In the next example, an excerpt from a conversation class, we see that Gloria takes up a different footing as well as a different participant status:

(2) Conversation 2/27/03

G: uh-hm. Mas como vai?

T: Eu tudo bem, tudo bem. Eu tô cansado. Tô cansado, tô precisando de férias também. Eu também tenho duas semanas horríveis pela frente, mas tudo bem.

G: **Mas você é... um prog—você é um, num programa de doctorado?**

T: É, tô no programa de doutorado. Você tá no?

G: Master's.

G: uh-hm. But how are you?

T: Fine, fine. I'm tired. I'm tired, I need vacations. I also have two horrible weeks coming up, but it's ok.

G: But you are... a prog—you are a, in a doctoral program?

T: Yes, I'm in the doctoral program. You're in?

G: Master's.

As argued earlier, Gloria here takes up a more sophisticated positioning towards the utterance (as both animator and author). In addition, she selects the topic and self-provides speaking rights, characteristics that were not present in (1). Furthermore, in (2) the learner makes use of discourse strategies (such as repetition, hesitation and self-correction) that were not present in (1) either, in the articulation of a polar question that serves an information seeking function, therefore calling for a response addressing this need. In this sense, in (2) content is more important than form—again, that is not the case in (1), where form is fundamental. In this respect, it is worth noting that the distinction

between *ser* and *estar* was also the focus in (1) and that the fact that this distinction was handled successfully there (about three weeks earlier) does not mean that it was actually “learned.”

An additional point needs to be made here: the fact that in (2), but not in (1), Gloria positions herself as principal as well, by revealing her own commitment to the uttered words. It could well be argued, though, that taking on the principal’s role involves commitment not only to the words but also to the socially endorsed interactional rules attached to the very utterance. In this sense, her positioning as principal in (2) would convey the message that she feels authorized in that situation to propose a new topic for discussion and to author her own words in this respect. Conversely, this stance towards (1) would suggest that she acknowledges, and does not challenge, the notion that students are expected to follow suggested topics and to echo others’ voices.

Keeping in mind that the notion of participant status involves the utterer’s positioning not only towards the utterance, but also towards others in interaction, we could describe the previous examples as in Table 1:

Table 1
Positioning of the utterer in examples (1) and (2)

	Positioning of the utterer in relation to the utterance	Positioning of the utterer in relation to interactants
(1)	Animator; Principal (emphasizing passive role of learner and lack of commitment towards propositional content)	-No acknowledgement of other students; -Conceptualization of the teacher as the most powerful participant, who is to say whether her words are “correct” or “incorrect”;
(2)	Animator; Author; Principal (emphasizing active role of learner and commitment towards propositional content)	-Creator of involvement between participants; -Conceptualization of participants as holders of symmetrical relationships

In sum, the excerpts in (1) and (2) illustrate that the same individual can take up different footings as well as different participant statuses through the production of apparently similar utterances. Also, we noted that the questions in focus, though similar in structure, serve different functions in the two scenarios. In the next section we will expand this discussion by arguing that embedded in the examination of participant framework is the examination of what other voices the learner draws upon in the development of her own voice(s) in Portuguese.

4. The learner’s voices

Linked to the notion of participant statuses is the notion of “ownership” of participants’ voices. In section 3 we saw that the voices animated by a learner may be voices which the learner does not acknowledge as her own. Relevant to this discussion is Bakhtin’s (1981: 342) notions of *authoritative discourse* and *internally persuasive discourse*: whereas the former reaches us impregnated with pre-established authority and “demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own” not by adjusting it to our understandings but by incorporating it and reproducing it the way we have acquired it, the latter involves the dynamic creation of novel meanings and the utterers’ active roles in developing their ownership of words. As argued in the previous section, in this case study the voices from the textbook and the teacher’s voices are the main voices animated by the learner in the classroom, and these voices tend to require total obedience and verbatim echoing. In addition, it is worth noting that these voices emphasize form at the expense of content. Hence, when content is important in that setting, when Gloria wants to vocalize her own meanings (i.e., when she “has something to say”), she tends to use English, as observed below:

(3) Class 2/11/03

T: Este rio é longo, estreito e escuro.

G: Esta... estrada é longa, estreita e escura.

T: E escura, I love it when they change the vowel, ok? O idioma alemão não é fácil.

S: A aula alemã não é fácil.

T: Não é fácil. Okay? Alemão (?). Okay? Those are great. Okay? Those are really cool. Alright. We're done this time, you can look ahead where we're going with the text now that (?).

G: Do we... do we have a... provinha?

T: We're having a provinha. Yes, there's a little prova at the end of the sixth week, which is why I went back and reviewed all this good schmeer at the beginning of the day today.

G: And it goes up to page 62?

T: It'll go up to, yeah, yeah, like what? Actually, I don't think I'm putting... I've got a draft, I don't think that colors is there.

G: Okay.

T: So I didn't go that far.

T: This river is long, narrow and dark.

G: This... this road is long, narrow and dark.

T: And dark, I love it when they change the vowel, ok? The German language is not easy.

S: The German class is not easy.

T: It's not easy. Okay? German (?). Okay? Those are great. Okay? Those are really cool. Alright. We're done this time, you can look ahead where we're going with the text now that (?).

G: Do we... do we have a... quiz?

T: We're having a quiz. Yes, there's a little quiz at the end of the sixth week, which is why I went back and reviewed all this good schmeer at the beginning of the day today.
(...)

Example (3) shows that Gloria's own meanings in the classroom are produced in English, not in the target language: while the drill exercise (which does not create deep involvement from the part of the learner) is done in Portuguese, a more committed interaction between Gloria and the teacher happens in English. Outside of the classroom, however, Gloria tends to resort to Portuguese even when she wants to express more sophisticated notions. Yet this fact could well challenge the value and the impact of classroom instruction—after all, if the learner is able to make use of sophisticated discourse out of the classroom even though she does not engage in similar practices as part of her learning, then the reasons orienting the language instruction would become seriously affected. Consequently, it is important that we understand exactly what voices she takes on, and what participant statuses she develops on these occasions. Example (4) illustrates one of these events:

(4) Interview 2/18/03³

I: (...) Como é essa questão do erro na aula de conversação?

G: um...

I: Vocês são corrigidos, não são corrigidos, são corrigidos de vez em quando...

G: Somos, uh, de vez em quando. Não sempre. Beto é muito bom, mas ele fala se você fala o mesmo erro duas, três ve—veces, ele fala, é errado. Você precisa corrigir o erro. Mas uh... é muito rápido, ele não fala sempre. Oh, um momento, você precisa, um? um momento? Você precisa de corrigir isto, isso, aquilo. Uh, mas quando ele p[o]de falar, ele fala, mas é uma coisa errada falar, bla, bla, bla.

I: How are mistakes dealt with at the conversation table?

G: um...

I: Are you corrected, aren't you corrected, are you corrected sometimes...

G: We are, uh, sometimes. Not always. Beto is very good, but he says if you make the same mistake two, three ti—times, he says, it is wrong. You need to correct the mistake. But uh...

it's very fast, he doesn't always say that. Oh, one moment, you need, one? one moment? You need to correct this, this, that. Uh, but when he can say it, he says it, but it's wrong to say, blah, blah, blah.

Example (4) illustrates how the learner incorporates the speech of another person into her own. And although reported speech, by definition, involves the interplay of different people's voices (and therefore illustrates the articulation of a rather complex discourse⁴), it is worth noting that Gloria's reported speech is permeated with validation questions (showing that Gloria is seeking the "approval" of the interviewer regarding the appropriateness, regarding form, of what she says). In other words, the questions posed here are not questions originally present in the speech reported—rather, they are questions articulated by a learner who is actually asking her instructor to tell her what the "right" words are.

As illustrated above, in the classroom the learner animates voices other than her own in Portuguese, while her own voice is articulated in English. Outside of the classroom, however, she may display a more complex and sophisticated interplay of voices, including the conscious rearticulation of the voices of others in her own discourse. Yet the fact that she seeks confirmation of her successful appropriation of voices indicates that she has not developed full ownership of these voices. Since *questions* are closely connected with these negotiations and also a commonly found linguistic strategy in the three settings, we will now proceed to the discussion of the learner's questions across the data, including the examination of how the articulation of these questions reflects Gloria's positionings (to her utterances, to other participants) and voices as a Portuguese learner.

5. Articulation of questions and examination of participant statuses and voices

5.1. Definition and categorization of questions

Questions (defined here as structures following an interrogative mood), in their canonical sense, are meant to serve an information seeking function. However, as Downing and Locke (2002: 191-192) point out, "interrogative structures display a variety of speech act functions," including exclamation, equivalence to a negative statement, directive, introducing a topic, or asking oneself a question.

In her well-known ethnographic study about how individuals from two working-class communities in the Carolinas learned to use language at home and at school, Heath (1983) examined the questions asked of preschool children in their process of learning how to talk, and she noticed that different communities emphasized different types of question, and that in neither of the two communities information-seeking questions were among the most predominant types.

In the classroom discourse scenario, Long and Sato (1983), based on Kearsley's (1976) definitions, categorize questions by teachers in the ESL classroom. They divide questions into echoic (including comprehension checks, clarification requests, and confirmation checks) and epistemic (including referential, display, expressive, and rhetorical questions). In their classroom data, display questions (e.g., What's the opposite of "up" in English?) were the most common occurrence, totaling 50.7% of all questions. In informal interactions between native and non-native speakers, they found only 2 display questions, or 0.15% of all questions. In the informal interactions, the most common type of question found (75.5%) were referential questions (the example given by the authors is, Why didn't you do your homework?). Edwards and Mercer (1987) argue that the prevalence of teachers' questions in the classroom is not to be associated with an also frequent search for information. They maintain that teachers' questions are a discourse strategy that aims at establishing and maintaining control.

Previous research, as we can see, has found that interrogatives (both in instructional and in non-instructional contexts) do not necessarily serve an information-seeking function. Likewise, our assumption in this paper is that questions may, but will not necessarily, be primarily associated with the referential function of language. Alternatively, questions may serve interpersonal and textual functions as well.

In this case study, we have identified five basic types of questions produced by the learner across the three settings, as shown in the table below:

Table 2
Types of questions produced by Gloria

Type of question	Characterization	Response called for	Learner's positioning in relation to the utterance	Learner's positioning in relation to other interactants
1. Questions in a drill exercise E.g., Ele é garçom? 'Is he a waiter?'	Part of drill exercises included in the book; uttered by the learner as she does the exercise; focus on form	Verbal or non-verbal response from the teacher, "evaluating" question, following the I-R-E pattern	Animator, Principal (emphasizing passive role of learner and lack of commitment towards propositional content).	-No acknowledgement of other students; -Teacher as most powerful participant, expected to say if her words are "correct" or "incorrect";
2. Validation questions E.g., Comigo não. Comigo? 'Not <i>comigo</i> . <i>Comigo</i> '?	Questions that help the learner make sure she is using the appropriate word, pronunciation, or grammar; focus on form	Interlocutor's verbal or non-verbal "approval" of what was uttered. ("E" in the I-R-E pattern)	Animator, at times Author, Principal (emphasizing lack of knowledge and/or power to make the decision)	-No acknowledgement of other students; -Interlocutor as most powerful participant, expected to say if her words are "correct" or "incorrect";
3. Information seeking questions E.g., Do we have a provinãa? 'Do we have a quiz?'	Questions that request information the speaker does not have; focus on content	Response containing the information requested, filling the "R" slot in the I-R(-E) pattern	Author, Animator, Principal (emphasizing active role of utterer in the creation and establishment of propositional content)	-No acknowledgement of other students; -Interlocutor expected to fill in the information gap, but signalling a more symmetrical interactional pattern among participants
4. Confirmation questions E.g., Yogi-ism?	Questions that seek confirmation of something uttered by the interlocutor; focus on form and content	Verbal or non-verbal confirmation of what has been uttered earlier by interlocutor (an "R") none	Animator; Author (with a deeper sense of ownership than Type 1); Principal (expressing "sentiment" of ownership of voices)	-No acknowledgement of other students; -Interlocutor conceptualized in symmetrical terms
5. Indirect speech questions E.g., Tudo mundo me falou, como, como se chama? 'Everyone said to me, what's his name?'	Questions that may be present in reported speech; focus on content	none	Animator, Principal (expressing "sentiment" of ownership of other voices)	-No acknowledgement of other students; -Interlocutor conceptualized in symmetrical terms

Having categorized the questions uttered by the learner in our case study, we can now proceed to look at the data in the different settings. This analysis is the topic of the next subsection.

5.2. Data analysis

5.2.1. Classroom

In the classroom, the questions uttered by the learner in the target language either seek validation when completing an exercise (25%), as in example (5), or are merely part of a drill exercise from the textbook (25%), as in example (6):

(5) Class 2/11/03

T: Uma boa coisa. A good thing, ok, uma boa coisa. [to G:] A bad thing.

G: É ... uma... má coisa?

T: É uma coisa má, or má coisa, if you want to put it there—we don't want as many of those in front as Spanish can. It's very rare to do it, and when we do it we're making a big deal out of it. So, é uma má coisa. Spanish in fact has things like, you know, get it and put it up front (...) We leave most of them behind. Okay? So, uma coisa má. Okay? Uma coisa má.

(6) Class 1/21/03

T: Cool. Okay, very nice. Oito.

S: Quando eles vai voltar para São Paulo? No domingo.

T: Quando ele vai voltar? Vai voltar no domingo. É? E ultimamente nove, faz favor.

G: O que é a profissão dele?

T: Cool. Okay, very nice. Eight.

S: When are they going to go back to São Paulo? On Sunday.

T: When is he going back? He's going back on Sunday. Right? And lastly nine, please.

G: What does he do?

The other two functions identified for questions in the classroom were information seeking (41.7%) and confirmation (8.3%), both exemplified in (7); however, those were all uttered in English (half of all questions uttered by the learner in the classroom).

(7) Class 3/11/03

S: Ele estava pondo o carro na garagem quando começou a chover.

T: Começou a chover.

G: Does it have the circumflex? (Info seeking)

T: Doesn't need it.

G: No? (Confirmation)

T: Doesn't need it.

G: Okay.

S: He was parking the car in the garage when it started to rain.

T: It started to rain.

G: Does it have the circumflex?

T: Doesn't need it.

G: No?

T: Doesn't need it.

G: Okay.

5.2.2. Interviews

The analysis of questions formulated by the learner during interviews revealed four types of questions, as in the classroom, though they are not all the same (in interviews there are obviously no drill exercises). In the interviews the learner uses indirect speech, which sometimes contain interrogatives (she quotes herself and others), as shown in (8).

(8) Interview 2/28/03

G: Oh, mas uh, o médico foi mui—foi muito... eu não sé, ele falou oh, você está estressada. Não é um problema. Eu lhe mir—mirei, e falei, não é um problema, uma semana, **vinte libras?**

G: Oh, but uh, the doctor was ve—was very... I don't know, he said oh, you are stressed. There's no problem. I look—looked at him, and said, not a problem, one week, twenty pounds?

In the interviews, the majority of the questions uttered by the learner (68%) were validation questions. All but 2.5% of the questions (2/79) were uttered in Portuguese; those two questions uttered in English fell in the information seeking category. All other questions were produced in the target language.

5.2.3. Conversation

The types of questions found in the conversation setting were the same as in the interviews (information seeking, confirmation, validation, and indirect speech). Examples of the four types are given below:

(9) Conversation 2/13/03

G: Que são pombinhos?

G: What are pombinhos? (lit. 'little pigeons')

(10) Conversation 2/27/03

T: Mas você tá estressada por quê? Por causa do...?

G: **Ah, a morte?**⁵

T: A morte do seu amigo?

G: Da minha amiga.

T: But you are stressed why? Because of...?

G: Oh, the death?

T: The death of your friend (male)?

G: Of my friend (female).

(11) Conversation 2/13/03

G: **É a época?** de amor.

T: /uh-hm, uh-hm

G: It is the season? for love.

T: /uh-hm, uh-hm

(12) Conversation 2/27/03

G: Ela canta pra mim, e ela é uh... gostou, **gostou da canção?**

G: She sings to me, and she's... did you like, did you like the song?

In the conversation setting, validation questions are also more common than other types (53%, or 40/75). Information seeking questions total 41.3% (31/75). In this setting, the target language was also much more used than English or Spanish. Nonetheless, we did find two questions that were translations, one to English and one to Spanish. We classified those questions as information seeking (the learner wanted to know what a certain word/expression meant). We also found one information seeking question that involved both English and Spanish (“How do you say odiar, hate?”). Those three questions total 4% (3/75) of the questions uttered by Gloria in the conversation setting.

5.2.4. Discussion of the results

The data collected in the three environments reveal that those environments differ from each other, but also that there are differences between the questions produced in classroom, on one hand, and in interviews and conversation on the other. These differences are clearly shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Types of questions uttered by Gloria in different settings (percentages)

	class	interviews	conversation
drill	25	0	0
validation	25	68	53
info seeking	41.6	17.8	41.3
confirmation	8.3	3.8	1.3

The percentages in Table 3 show that, comparatively, information seeking questions occur more than other types in the classroom, while outside of the classroom validation questions are prevalent. All the information seeking questions in the classroom were uttered in English, while in interviews and conversation classes only about 11% of the information seeking questions (~3.2% of the total number of questions in those settings) were in a language other than Portuguese; all the other questions were in the target language. Recall that information seeking questions comprise 41.7% of all questions uttered by the learner in the classroom—all in English. In interviews, only 2.5% of all questions are in English, and in conversations that number rises slightly to 4%. In spite of the more frequent use of the target language outside of the classroom, it can be argued that the learner still perceives English (or Spanish) as a valid alternative when there is a breakdown or an impasse in communication.

Table 3 shows that the percentages for information seeking questions (uttered in English, Portuguese, or Spanish) are similar for the classroom and the conversation settings, but considerably lower in the interviews. The low frequency of that type of question in interviews is not surprising, since the interview setting suggests a frame where the interviewee answers, and doesn't ask, questions.

As is clear in Table 3, we attest a predominance of validation questions in the two environments outside of the classroom. Although we have categorized questions such as the one in (11) above as validation, those could potentially also be grouped in a broader information seeking category, since the speaker wants to make sure that what she is saying is indeed appropriate in Portuguese. Many validation questions could be rephrased as “Am I using the right word?,” or “Am I pronouncing it correctly?” These are illustrations of the learner's voice (Kramersch 1988), and reflect a learner who is not able to assess critically her lexical/phonological performance, and who depends on a more competent peer to provide these answers. This assumption suggests that these questions operate almost as “question-directives”⁶ (Heath 1983), in the sense that they carry a secondary message in addition to the validation proper and that they call for a realignment between participants—in other words, they suggest a request for help, (re)positioning the learner and her interlocutors (the teacher, the organizer

of the conversations, and the interviewer) in very clear asymmetrical relationships, in which the latter holds the power to give the “right” answer.

The predominance of validation questions outside of the classroom is such that the interlocutor might mistake a question involving an information gap (which we classified as information seeking) for mere validation, as seen below:

(13) Conversation 2/27/03

T: Tá precisando de férias. Tá precisando de férias.

G: Férias? Férias?

T: Férias.

G: O que é?

T: Vacation.

T: You need vacations. You need vacations.

G: Vacations? Vacations?

T: Vacations.

G: What is that?

T: Vacation.

What (13) suggests is that Gloria’s interlocutor was used to her requests for validation, so much so that at times, when she was actually requesting that a certain meaning be clarified, the interlocutor simply confirmed the pronunciation of the word. It is not until Gloria actually asks what the word means that her interlocutor provides the answer sought.

To sum up, validation questions predominate in the interview and the conversation settings, to the point that other types of questions might be mistaken for validation. In the classroom, information seeking questions are more prevalent, as would be expected, but they are all uttered in English, not in the target language.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the roles taken on and the voices developed by a Spanish speaker who was studying Portuguese. We analyzed interrogatives uttered by the learner in three different settings. Following Goffman’s (1981) categories, the learner in this case study “animates” the questions we have examined. She is the “author” of some of the questions, becoming predominantly a “principal” that reinforces the authoritative discourse embedded in traditionally asymmetrical roles played by those who represent canonical knowledge (teacher, etc) and those who do not (learner). In other words: information seeking questions in English are always answered, which may signal that the learner doesn’t feel the need to learn how to ask those questions in Portuguese. Likewise, validation questions animated by the learner are continually addressed unproblematically, signaling to both the questioner and her receivers that (i) it is okay for the learner to keep asking them and not to start developing alternative ways to address these issues more autonomously; and (ii) that the absence of other types of validation questions is not a problem either. As an alternative for validation questions, the learner might have asked questions such as “Is this the right pronunciation?,” or “Do you say X in Portuguese?”

Our study has been constrained by the fact that the three settings in which the data were collected were related to institutional instruction. Further studies of this kind would certainly profit from data collected in other types of environment, such as chats with friends, that could be compared and contrasted with data from instructional settings.

Our results show that the learner makes frequent use of validation questions when interacting with only one interlocutor—even in the classroom, where the learner interacts only with the teacher, not with other learners. The pattern developed in the classroom persists outside of the classroom: as such, different interlocutors (teachers, interviewers, conversational partners) are always available to determine what is “right” or what is “wrong”. Moreover, on occasion, a language other than Portuguese is acceptable (and accepted) to negotiate meaning.

At first glance, it may seem that the teacher is mainly, or even solely, responsible for the learner’s use of English or Spanish rather than Portuguese. However, this would be a simplistic solution for a

more complicated situation: the other interlocutors also accept the non-use of the target language to negotiate meaning, and the learner herself does not hesitate to use that resource. In line with a Bakhtinian conception of language, we understand that validation questions illustrate a type of authoritative discourse which members of this discourse community resort to, do not challenge and therefore legitimize. It follows that this case study raises a question regarding instruction and preparedness of the learner: is the learner being prepared to deal with the complexities and the dynamism of communication by developing a narrow perspective vis-à-vis the formulation of interrogatives?

The results of this study suggest that the discursive model implemented in the classroom has an important impact on the ways the learner conceptualizes the learning of Portuguese, and on the development of her voices in other settings as well. Instead of fostering creativity and internally-persuasive discourse, the model constrains “what” and “how” the learner should speak, imposing an emphasis on the authoritative facet of the target language (i.e., its system at phonological, morphological, syntactical and lexical levels) at the expense of knowledge of its discursive dimension. In this sense, these results also point to the fact that educators and researchers must develop a broader understanding of the complexities involved in the articulation of different voices by the learner.

Notes

* We would like to thank the student who agreed to participate in this case study. Thanks also to the anonymous reviewer who read an earlier version of this paper and made invaluable suggestions.

1. All names used are pseudonyms.

2. In this and other examples, T means “Teacher/Conversation leader”, G means “Gloria”, S means “Student other than Gloria.”

3. In this and other examples, I means “Interviewer.”

4. Haworth (1999) suggests that the occurrence of reported speech suggests the articulation of internally-persuasive discourse.

5. This question was classified as confirmation because we understand it as “You mean, the death?”. It might have been classified as something else (perhaps as a clarification request), and it was the only confirmation question found in the conversation setting.

6. Heath defines question-directives as “[r]ealignment of behavior and/or utterance of a politeness formula. Often carries secondary message to listeners other than the child.” (Heath 1983: 130)

Appendix

Conventions used in the transcriptions

/ onset of overlap

(?) unintelligible speech

(...) omission

[] phonetic transcription

() non-linguistic behavior

Bold indicates relevant parts in the example

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