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## Developing a Textbook for Teaching German in an Academic Context: Guiding Principles and Thematic Structure of the Zeitgeist Project

*Elaboração de um livro didático para o ensino de alemão em contexto acadêmico: princípios norteadores e estrutura temática do projeto Zeitgeist*

*Elaboración de un libro didáctico para la enseñanza del alemán en el contexto académico: principios orientadores y estructura temática del proyecto Zeitgeist*

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### Abstract

This article presents the guiding principles and thematic frameworks of the Zeitgeist research project, which aims to develop a textbook for teaching German in the Brazilian academic context. Addressing the gaps identified in critiques of global teaching materials, this project seeks to offer an alternative approach that considers the experiences, needs, and local

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realities of Brazilian language students and future German language professionals. Based on the guiding principles of content orientation, a focus on autonomy, and a critical-reflective and decolonial perspective, the project proposes a material that promotes authentic, participatory German teaching aligned with local needs. In addition to providing an analysis of the challenges posed by using global materials, the article introduces practical examples illustrating the didactic approaches adopted in the textbook, highlighting the importance of critical and contextualized teaching for German teachers and learners in Brazil.

**Keywords:** German teaching. textbook development. critical-local approach.

## Resumo

*Este artigo apresenta os princípios orientadores e estruturas temáticas do projeto de pesquisa Zeitgeist, cujo objetivo é a elaboração de um livro didático para ensino de alemão no contexto acadêmico brasileiro. Partindo das lacunas evidenciadas nos estudos de crítica dos materiais didáticos globais, este projeto busca oferecer uma abordagem alternativa que considere as experiências, demandas e realidades locais de estudantes de Letras e futuras profissionais brasileiras de língua alemã. Com base nos princípios norteadores da orientação para o conteúdo, foco na autonomia e da perspectiva crítico-reflexiva e decolonial, propõe-se um material que incentive o ensino de alemão autêntico, participativo e alinhado às necessidades locais. Além de oferecer uma análise dos desafios enfrentados pelo uso de materiais globais, o artigo introduz exemplos práticos que ilustram as abordagens didáticas adotadas no livro, destacando a importância de um ensino crítico e contextualizado para docentes e aprendizes de alemão no Brasil.*

**Palavras-chave:** Ensino de alemão. elaboração de livro didático. abordagem crítica-local.

## Resumen

*Este artículo presenta los principios orientadores y las estructuras temáticas del proyecto de investigación Zeitgeist, cuyo objetivo es la elaboración de un libro didáctico para la enseñanza del alemán en el contexto académico brasileño. Partiendo de las brechas evidenciadas en los estudios de crítica de los materiales didácticos globales, este proyecto busca ofrecer un enfoque alternativo que considere las experiencias, demandas y realidades locales de los estudiantes de Letras y futuras profesionales brasileñas de lengua alemana. Basándose en los principios orientadores de la orientación hacia el contenido, el enfoque en la autonomía y la perspectiva crítico-reflexiva y decolonial, se propone un material que incentive la enseñanza del alemán autêntico, participativo y alineado con las necesidades locales. Además de ofrecer un análisis de los desafíos enfrentados con el uso de materiales globales, el artículo introduce ejemplos prácticos que ilustran los enfoques didácticos adoptados en el libro, destacando la importancia de una enseñanza crítica y contextualizada para docentes y aprendices de alemán en Brasil.*

**Palabras clave:** Enseñanza del alemán. elaboración de libro didáctico. enfoque crítico-local.

## Introduction

In most university contexts where German is taught in Brazil, seventeen public institutions offering bachelor's and/or teaching degrees in Language Studies with a German major (Voerkel, 2017), language courses are primarily based on imported textbooks, often produced by international publishers for a global audience. Due to the pressure to conform to global markets, such materials frequently fail to establish a meaningful connection with Brazilian socio-cultural realities, as they are based on a Eurocentric model that diverges from local themes, images, and representations. This disconnection can negatively impact learners' and teachers' participation and motivation (Bohunovsky & Bolognini, 2005; Uphoff, 2008; Arantes, 2018; Aquino & Ferreira, 2023), especially when students do not see themselves reflected in the content. Furthermore, these materials typically present rigid approaches, progressions, and structures, which hinder teachers' creativity and ability to adapt the content.

In recent years, university-level German teaching in Brazil has undergone significant transformations in response to new educational realities and demands, incorporating diverse pedagogical perspectives and practices. This process has been driven by factors that inevitably raise questions about the ideological constructions of knowledge and the power relations embedded in language and language teaching (Baptista & López-Gopar, 2019). Within this broader movement, critical approaches to teaching and learning German have gained prominence, particularly those that foreground the social, political, and institutional dimensions of language education. One of the central concerns in this context relates to the widespread reliance on international textbooks, especially in academic teacher education, and their limited responsiveness to local realities. Despite these advances, there remains a notable lack of dialogue and reflection on the possibilities of conceiving German language and cultural education from a plural, locally grounded perspective (Moita Lopes, 2006; Aquino, 2025). These discussions resonate with the principles of a critical and undisciplined applied linguistics (Moita Lopes, 2006), which challenges traditional disciplinary boundaries and emphasizes the legitimacy of local voices and contexts in language teaching practices. It is within this critical framework that we adopt the term “additional language” (AL) rather than “foreign language”. While the latter tends to conceptualize language learning as taking place outside learners' social lives, the notion of an additional language underscores language as a resource for participation in social practices, highlighting the coexistence of multiple linguistic resources within learners' repertoires and their use in concrete sociocultural contexts (Schlatter & Garcez, 2009; Ferreira & Aquino, 2024).

Against this backdrop, the Zeitgeist Project was launched in 2019 as an innovative alternative for German language teaching in Brazil, rooted in critical discussion and the development of an original, locally grounded textbook for the university context. Conceived as a response to the limitations of imported teaching materials, the project aims to create a textbook tailored to the Brazilian academic environment, especially for the education of future language professionals. The project brings together faculty from seven universities (USP, UERJ, UFRJ, UNICAMP, UFPR, UFC, and UFSC) and is based on four core guiding principles: content orientation, learner autonomy, critical-reflective perspective, and decolonial perspective.

Unlike traditional materials that prioritize grammar and adopt a utilitarian view of language, Zeitgeist focuses on linguistic and cultural engagement through themes that are relevant to the sociocultural reality of Brazilian students, allowing for a more discursive and reflective approach. The selection of texts favors authentic materials, i.e., texts that were not originally produced for teaching purposes, but which offer opportunities to work with issues and discourses close to students' lived experiences. Consequently, the project values active and autonomous participation from learners and instructors by offering authentic topics and materials, along with the possibility of adapting content and flexible progression of activities. These are organized around two core strands, production (oral and written) and reception (reading and comprehension). This model enables teaching to be adjusted according to specific needs and interests, fostering greater autonomy and creativity in the development of linguistic and sociocultural competencies.

Inspired by a transgressive approach to Applied Linguistics (Moita Lopes, 2006) and a decolonial perspective (Mignolo, 2003), the project encourages more engaged reflection and participation concerning the German language and its cultural implications. Through themes such as identity, time, and values, the Zeitgeist textbook seeks to break with stereotypical views of Germany and the German language, creating space for the discussion of topics relevant to the Brazilian context, including family diversity and different social dynamics. Regarding the decolonial approach, the project aims to deconstruct the power relations embedded in international teaching materials, which tend to reflect a unilateral vision of culture and language (Mignolo, 2003). Thus, Zeitgeist strives to foster an epistemological shift, valuing local knowledge and realities while offering didactic material that is in dialogue with Brazilian social and cultural practices. In doing so, the project contributes to building a more representative and inclusive model of German language education.

The following sections offer reflections on the nature of global teaching materials and the limitations they present for contextualized and socially relevant language teaching. We then introduce the project's core principles and didactic-methodological approaches, with concrete examples aligned to these ideas. Finally, we outline conclusions and future perspectives for developing locally authored teaching materials.

## Global Textbooks

Several studies have pointed out that textbooks play a central role in shaping teaching practices, learning trajectories, and representations of language and culture in foreign and additional language education (Uphoff, 2008). When such materials are produced for global circulation, they tend to impose standardized contents and perspectives that may limit learners' engagement and critical participation, especially in contexts distant from the socio-cultural realities portrayed (Bohunovsky & Bolognini, 2005).

The production of global textbooks for teaching German has been dominated by a limited group of "experts" affiliated with major international publishers, mostly headquartered in Germany. These professionals, often distant from the realities of local educational contexts, exert control over content selection, standardization, and progression, aiming to serve a supposedly global and homogeneous audience. As a result, these materials are designed to be compatible with a variety of countries, without considering the specific cultural, social, and linguistic features of each region. This practice centers on the creation of market-oriented products, prioritizing alignment with international normative frameworks and widely recognized certifications, such as those established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Therefore, these materials are the result of a highly centralized process in which large publishers dominate the production and global distribution of content structure, progression, and thematic focus in GAL teaching. The "experts" involved in producing these resources typically follow guidelines established by international organizations and their commercial interests. Key decisions are made concerning theme selection, pedagogical approach, content sequencing, activity design, and visual elements. As such, topics considered universal and neutral, such as travel, shopping, and aspects of popular German culture, i.e., are prioritized over local or more complex issues, resulting in language learning that occurs in a social vacuum, disconnected from real-life contexts.

Content standardization is a hallmark of global textbooks. Learning timelines and progression are uniformly defined, based on the assumption that students around the world should follow similar paths. This is reflected, for instance, in the sequence of units, which frequently address topics such as personal introductions (name, age, profession) and portray a middle-class urban lifestyle, people who ski, play the piano, and travel. Cultural aspects are often presented from a superficial and stereotypical perspective of Germany (and Europe), avoiding topics such as poverty, war, immigration, or religion. Even recent attempts at diversification and inclusion have not managed to broaden the range of sociocultural realities and identities represented. Topics such as social

inequality, ethnic and racial diversity, gender and sexuality dynamics, among others, are often excluded in the name of maintaining “neutral” and “universal” content.

This reveals an underlying logic whereby publishers seek to ensure materials are applicable to any context, but the side effect is a lack of flexibility for adapting content to specific local realities and needs. By omitting the ethnic and cultural diversity of contemporary Germany, as well as of other German-speaking countries, these materials help perpetuate a limited and exclusionary view of culture and language. Similarly, the selected texts, often drawn from sources that reinforce these stereotypes, contribute to content repetition that rarely challenges students to reflect critically on relevant sociocultural issues.

This uniformity facilitates the global commercialization of textbooks for publishers interested in expanding their markets, and it meets the requirements of international language certifications. Many major publishers work directly with institutions responsible for German proficiency exams, such as the Goethe-Institut, producing materials that strictly follow CEFR guidelines. This reinforces a rigid standardization focused primarily on exam preparation, to the detriment of more meaningful themes that could foster greater participation and motivation among learners and teachers throughout the language teaching-learning process.

Consequently, as these materials are produced for a broad and diverse audience, they do not emerge from a diagnosis of the specificities of the countries in which they will be used. They often ignore cultural, historical, and social elements. In Brazil, for instance, global textbooks frequently overlook the country's linguistic and cultural diversity, resulting in a disconnect between the presented content and students' lived experiences. Moreover, the absence of local topics and questions in global textbooks tends to generate disinterest, as students do not find the material relatable. The predominance of themes and visuals centered around a European worldview may lead to a learning environment where students feel alienated from the material used to develop their linguistic knowledge.

Another critical issue is the textual selection in these materials, often composed of highly didacticized texts designed to reinforce linguistic content through excessive repetition and simplified language. To fit grammar and vocabulary exercises, these texts frequently address topics disconnected from the interests of Brazilian learners. Criticism of global materials thus relates not only to their lack of local adaptation but also to their failure to provide critical and socially engaged language education — both in terms of content and contemporary social issues. The result is a model of German instruction that barely challenges students to reflect on the complex realities of the world they live in, reducing language and culture to oversimplified and repetitive representations. This leads to low motivation and minimal active participation in the language learning process.

To illustrate some of these limitations, we present examples from one of the most widely used textbooks in Brazilian universities, *DaF kompakt neu A2* (Braun et al., 2016). In the lessons about the cities of Cologne (Lesson 11) and Munich (Lesson 14), the opening images present a reduced vision of these cities, predominantly associated with festivities (Cologne Carnival and Oktoberfest in Munich) and tourist attractions. According to Arantes (2018), the organization of content and themes in global textbooks reveals a disciplining of knowledge that imposes limits on what should be known and talked about. This is achieved through the selection of generic and artificial communicative situations and visuals that place students in the role of tourists or outsiders. In such contexts, students are not properly represented and are merely expected to reproduce controlled knowledge, essentially, to talk about nothing, nowhere and to nobody (Arantes, 2018), that is, to practice the language in contexts devoid of personal meaning.

Image 1 - Lesson 11, DaF kompakt neu A1, Auf nach Köln



Source: DaF kompakt neu A2 (Braun et al., 2016, p. 28).

Image 2 - Lesson 11, DaF kompakt neu A1, Auszeit in München



Source: DaF kompakt neu A2 (Braun et al., 2016, p. 52).

The titles of these units (*Auf nach Köln* and *Auszeit in München*) further reflect a thematic association with travel, tourism, and leisure. While this tourist imaginary may initially attract curiosity, it is ultimately exclusionary, as it fails to represent a broader range of experiences and disregards the geographic and sociocultural distance between countries. In other words, Brazilian students are unlikely to engage meaningfully with such scenarios.

To deepen this reflection, we analyze how the theme of free time and hobbies is presented in two recent global textbooks: DaF kompakt neu A1 (Braun et al., 2016) and Akademie Deutsch A1+ (Schmohl et al., 2022). The visual materials from these books reveal a strong emphasis on leisure activities typically associated with high-income European contexts. Illustrations often include activities such as horseback riding, scuba diving, skydiving, or winter sports, all of which involve high costs and are inaccessible to most Brazilian students, whether due to financial reasons or geographic/climatic constraints. Although some more universal activities (e.g., listening to music, playing an instrument, watching TV) are present, the predominance of unrepresentative examples is clear. These textbooks ignore important contextual factors such as socioeconomic differences or family and work obligations, many students need to balance university studies with jobs and domestic responsibilities, leaving little or no “free time” as defined in the materials. As such, the concept of leisure is homogenized and Eurocentric, disconnected from the diverse living conditions of local learners.

Image 3 - Example from textbook DaF kompakt, lesson about free time

**3 Freizeit – Zeit für mich**

**a** Ordnen Sie die Hobbys den Bildern zu.

Tennis spielen | Rad fahren | Fernsehen schauen | reiten | Gitarre spielen | im Internet surfen | tauchen | rudern | Musik hören | Fallschirm springen | Schach spielen | wandern

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_  
 5. \_\_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_\_ 7. \_\_\_\_\_ 8. \_\_\_\_\_  
 9. \_\_\_\_\_ 10. \_\_\_\_\_ 11. \_\_\_\_\_ 12. \_\_\_\_\_

**b** Welche anderen Freizeitaktivitäten kennen Sie? Sammeln Sie.

**c** Machen Sie zwei Listen: Was machen Sie gern, was machen Sie nicht gern? Suchen Sie einen Partner / eine Partnerin und finden Sie heraus, was er / sie gern oder nicht gern macht. Fragen Sie wie in den Beispielen:

Spielst du gern Fußball?       Liest du gern?       Tanzst du gern?  
 Ja, sehr gern.       Nein, nicht so gern.       Nein, ich lese lieber.

**d** Stellen Sie nun Ihren Partner / Ihre Partnerin im Kurs vor.

Nadia spielt gern Fußball und tanzt gern.  
 Sie liest nicht gern und wandert nicht gern.

Source: DaF kompakt neu A2 (Braun et al., 2016, p. 43).

Image 3 - Example from textbook Akademie Deutsch, lesson about free time

**4.1 MEINE WOCHE**

**1.1 UNGEWÖHNLICHE HOBBYS**

a) Was machen die Leute auf den Bildern?

**IN DIESEM KAPITEL LERNEN SIE:**

- Wortschatz: Hobbys / Alltag
- Uhrzeiten erfragen und sagen
- Termine vereinbaren und absagen
- trennbare und untrennbare Verben
- dann / danach
- Konjunktionen auf Position 0
- Ordinalzahlen
- temporale Präpositionen

b) Wie finden Sie diese Hobbys? Sammeln Sie Adjektive. Ich finde das Hobby ...

interessant	langweilig	spektakulär	spannend	teuer
originell	extrem	gefährlich	cool	...

c) Sammeln Sie Hobbys zu den Fragen. Arbeiten Sie mit dem Wörterbuch.

- 1 Welche Hobbys und Interessen hast du?
- 2 Welche Hobbys sind typisch für deine Heimat?
- 3 Kennst du typisch deutsche Hobbys?

**SO + ZU**  
 Das Hobby ist so gefährlich!  
 = sehr gefährlich  
 Das Hobby ist zu gefährlich!  
 = zu viel! Mir gefällt das nicht!

Source: Akademie deutsch (Schmohl et al., 2022, p. 61).

Content that is so removed from the Brazilian context tends to cause disengagement, as students do not see themselves represented in the proposed activities and therefore engage only superficially. In Freirean terms, this constitutes a potentially alienating form of education, aligned with the “banking model” criticized by Freire (2004), in which content is deposited into learners without consideration for their prior knowledge or lived realities. As Freire (2004) argues, teaching is not about transferring knowledge, but about creating the conditions for its production or construction, a process that requires grounding learning in students’ real-world experiences. From a critical pedagogical and decolonial perspective, these thematic choices can also be understood as expressions of epistemic coloniality, in which dominant worldviews are privileged at the expense of local voices (Mignolo, 2003; Bohunovsky & Bolognini, 2005). By promoting an idealized and Eurocentric conception of leisure and everyday life, imported textbooks subordinate local histories to global projects (Mignolo, 2003), reinforcing power relations and silencing diverse experiences. As a result, German language education mediated exclusively through such materials risks becoming foreign (and even colonizing) for Brazilian students, rather than fostering a space for cultural dialogue.

## Starting points for a local textbook

Creating a local textbook for teaching German in Brazil requires a significant break from standardized global models designed by external experts for a homogeneous international audience. For such a textbook to be truly meaningful, we believe it is essential to adopt an approach that values the experiences, knowledge, and needs of local learners and educators. This new approach can be grounded in key theoretical frameworks such as critical pedagogy, decolonial thinking, and the use of authentic and flexible materials.

Critical pedagogy, as proposed by Paulo Freire (2004), offers a fundamental basis for the development of educational materials that are engaged with local needs. From this perspective, learning is not merely the transmission of information, but rather a practice of freedom involving critical thinking, dialogue, and the pursuit of social transformation. Learners (just like teachers) are encouraged to actively participate, make conscious decisions, and build knowledge collaboratively. Practically speaking, this perspective aims to foster deeper, more meaningful connections between the content being taught and the students’ lived experiences, leading to more transformative learning. Critical thinking becomes a central component, encouraging reflection not only on the language itself, but also on its cultural and social implications, and on the act of teaching itself. This approach challenges the traditional image of the “expert” as the sole authority on knowledge, thereby dismantling hierarchies and stereotypes that permeate global textbooks.

Instead, a local textbook creates space for participants in the educational context to become protagonists of their own learning, reflecting on themes and issues intimately connected to their social and cultural realities. This role reversal, from passive consumers of information to active co-constructors of knowledge, directly echoes Freire’s ideas, which advocate for a dialogical and problem-posing education in contrast to the banking model of education (Freire, 2004).

Decoloniality, as a proposal for German language teaching, is another essential starting point. Its objective is to deconstruct eurocentrism and the stereotypical representations often found in global teaching materials, which frequently idealize Germany while ignoring the diverse cultural and social realities of German-speaking countries and learners from other contexts. In the case of countries like Brazil, which are geographically and socio-historically distant from German speaking countries, a local textbook must foster an authentic educational experience, in which content directly engages with students’ lived experiences, thereby avoiding the aforementioned “social vacuum” in GAL teaching.

To this end, the selection of authentic texts and images plays a fundamental role: rather than conveying idealized and narrow representations of language and culture, these materials reflect real discourse produced in actual social contexts. Authentic texts, with uncontrolled vocabulary and more complex grammatical structures, allow for deeper work with reading strategies and foster reflection on the conditions of production, historical context, and the stance of the author. The use of such genuine texts opens up opportunities for critical reflection, helping to deconstruct clichés and promoting language teaching that is more aligned with learners’ sociocultural realities (Aquino &

Cherchiglia, 2021). In short, incorporating a decolonial perspective into GAL textbook development means embracing alternative epistemologies and histories, valuing, in line with Mignolo (2003), local histories over global projects, and shifting the axis of knowledge to include voices that have historically been marginalized.

The structure proposed in the *Zeitgeist* textbook, which divides content into production and reception strands, reflects this pursuit of autonomy, authenticity, and relevance. In the production strand, the emphasis is on preparing students to communicate (orally and in writing) effectively in GAL for professional, academic, or everyday purposes. In this component, focused on expression, we also take into account the multilingual reality of Brazilian learners: acknowledging the complexity of certain topics, the use of Portuguese for deeper reflection is accepted, not as a deviation, but as a strategic means for fostering greater critical engagement. Moreover, with the aim of stimulating production based on learners' prior linguistic and grammatical knowledge, this strand follows CEFR guidelines more closely, particularly in terms of textual complexity and content progression.

In other words, the production section follows a more structured linguistic progression, with less complex texts and activities designed to train all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), while still making room for students to talk about themselves and express their own experiences, drawing from their cultural and social backgrounds. This approach seeks to balance the need for systematization (especially important at beginner levels) with the desire for personalization and active participation.

The reception strand, in turn, allows for a different approach, centered on developing reading strategies and engaging with authentic (or semi-authentic) texts of greater complexity. Here, the goal is to prepare students to comprehend information in a variety of contexts (academic, journalistic, literary) thereby broadening their critical reading competence. Reception grammar is approached more flexibly, with students being sensitized to complex structures without being forced to immediately reproduce them or follow a rigid progression. Working with authentic text genres provides the opportunity to reflect on the contexts in which these texts were produced, their historical and social conditions, and the positioning of their authors. This metalinguistic and metacultural reflection deepens students' critical awareness, as it highlights real language in real use, embedded within power dynamics and ideologies, exactly the kind of awareness that critical education seeks to promote.

Another important strategy incorporated into the *Zeitgeist* project is the use of source materials, as proposed by Prabhu (1987). Source materials are teaching resources that provide a wide range of possible inputs, without the assumption that all of them will be used in a single lesson or in the same way across different groups. Unlike traditional textbooks, which are rigidly organized step-by-step, this type of material allows for greater content flexibility, enabling different lesson sequences and formats. This approach favors adaptation to each group's specific context, allowing teachers to make more informed pedagogical decisions tailored to their students' needs. Furthermore, source materials encourage teacher and learner autonomy, fostering a classroom environment that values active participation and collaborative knowledge building.

In summary, we maintain that developing a local textbook for GAL teaching in Brazil, as in the case of *Zeitgeist*, must be based on principles such as critical pedagogy, decoloniality, and the use of authentic and flexible materials. By promoting learner autonomy and valuing their knowledge and experiences, such materials can contribute to a more representative, inclusive, and meaningful model of German language education. The clear separation between production and reception, as well as the use of source materials, emerge as valuable tools for creating a dynamic, adaptable, and context-sensitive textbook that centers on the real needs of everyone involved in the teaching and learning process.

## A practical example from *Zeitgeist*

We now present an example of how the *Zeitgeist* textbook incorporates its guiding principles into practice. The theme of "free time" is introduced in Unit 4 of the first volume (intended for beginner levels), titled *Was ist Freizeit für Sie?* ("What is free time for you?"). As with other topics in the textbook, the production strand of this unit aims to

introduce core vocabulary in a contextualized manner, closely linked to the learners' realities, and to explore a strong connection between text and image.

Importantly, the main reading text in the unit was written by a Brazilian student of German and is accompanied by her photograph, it is a personal account of her daily life that immediately diverges from the examples found in the global textbooks discussed earlier. In the first exercise of the unit, learners are asked: "What is free time for you?," a question that explicitly challenges even the existence of free time in their routines. Alongside the prompt, images of various daily activities more typical of Brazilian learners are presented, and blank spaces are provided for students to add other activities relevant to their own lives. In the second exercise, the aforementioned authentic text is introduced: written by a USP student named Gabriela, it describes her daily schedule as she juggles university studies, work, and commuting across the city. Gabriela also shares how she spends her weekends (meeting friends, reading, and preparing for exams). The content explicitly addresses a reality common to many learners: the interplay of education, employment, and limited leisure time, a stark contrast to the concept of leisure portrayed in global textbooks.

Image 4 - Free Time Activity from Zeitgeist (Unit 4 – Was ist Freizeit für Sie?)

**PRODUKTION**

**TEIL A Was ist Freizeit für Sie?**  
O que é tempo livre para você?

**1. Schauen Sie sich die Bilder an und beantworten Sie die Frage: Was ist Freizeit für Sie?**  
Vieja as imagens e segun a resposta a pergunta: O que é tempo livre para você?

Erholung, Ruhe, Frust, Familie, Müdigkeit, Traum, Luxus

**2. Interviewen Sie zwei Personen aus der Gruppe. Fragen Sie:**  
Pergunte para duas pessoas da turma:  
Hast du Freizeit?  
Was ist Freizeit für dich?  
**b. Schreiben Sie die Antworten in die Tabelle unten.**  
Anote as respostas na tabela abaixo.

Name	Freizeit - ja/nein?	Freizeit ist...

**5. Gabriellas Alltag**  
A rotina de Gabriela

**a. Lesen Sie den Text. Wie ist der Alltag von Gabriela? Diskutieren Sie mit einem Partner / einer Partnerin.**  
Leia o texto. Como é a rotina de Gabriela? Discuta com um(a) colega.

**b. Was steht im Text? Kreuzen Sie die Antworten an.**  
O que o texto diz? Marque as respostas com X.

1) Wie oft hat Gabriela Freizeit?	( ) sehr oft	( ) selten
2) Wann hat sie Freizeit?	( ) nach der Uni	( ) am Wochenende
3) Wie ist ihr Alltag?	( ) sehr ruhig	( ) in Ordnung ( ) schwierig
4) Was macht sie in ihrer Freizeit?	( ) schlafen	( ) lesen ( ) Serien und Filme sehen

**c. Wortschatz: Wie heißen die Mahlzeiten auf Deutsch? Identifizieren Sie die Wörter im Text.**  
Vocabulário: Identifique no texto as palavras referentes às refeições em alemão.

	Verb/Verbkonstruktion	Substantiv
café da manhã		
almooço		
janta		

**d. Unterstreichen Sie die folgenden Verben im Text. Was ist hier passiert?**  
Sublinhe os seguintes verbos no texto: O que aconteceu aqui?

anfangen - aufstehen - ausgehen - einkaufen - fernsehen - vorbereiten

Source: Zeitgeist (forthcoming)

While imported materials often depict leisure activities that are costly or inaccessible, which, even when the vocabulary is successfully acquired, hinders genuine student engagement, Zeitgeist takes a realistic and relatable approach. Rather than portraying students as spectators of a distant lifestyle, the material invites them to reflect critically on their own relationship with time and leisure.

The inclusion of a testimony from a fellow Brazilian learner provides authenticity and promotes identification, while the chosen images allow for a more nuanced interpretation of time: not merely as "leisure activities," but as shaped by conditions and contexts that determine each person's available time. This strategy is a concrete application of both Freirean and decolonial principles incorporated into the project: by highlighting the voice of a real student and situating content within local experiences, the material breaks away from a homogeneous Eurocentric perspective and opens space for learners' awareness of their own world.

In essence, this example illustrates a type of textbook that places local stories and learners at the center of education, aligned with Freire's critical pedagogy and with the epistemological shift proposed by Mignolo (2003). In doing so, it challenges the status quo of global textbooks in practice. By adopting such strategies, we envision new possibilities

(and acknowledge the challenges) in developing locally authored teaching materials. These efforts aim to increasingly involve students in their own learning process, through themes and images that are representative and engaging.

With the Zeitgeist textbook, we hope to offer teachers and learners access to a diverse range of approaches, texts, images, and perspectives for German language instruction. In this sense, we argue that Zeitgeist's core objective is to promote stronger identification between students and the textbook, to make them feel represented and therefore more motivated to participate actively. The deliberate selection of texts and images as entry points for socially contextualized discussions has great potential to foster more relevant and inspiring language teaching, by incorporating ethn racial, social, and gender representations that reflect the sociocultural and situational contexts of both learners and educators.

## Conclusion

The development of the Zeitgeist project represents an important and innovative response to the challenges faced in GAL teaching in Brazil, especially regarding the use of global textbooks that are often unsuitable for the local context. The critical analysis of the gaps in imported textbooks highlights the need for an approach that not only acknowledges but also values the experiences, realities, and needs of Brazilian students. The project's guiding principles (content orientation, learning autonomy, and a critical-reflective and decolonial perspective) have proven essential in fostering truly authentic and participatory learning.

This approach allows both teachers and students to become protagonists in their own teaching-learning processes, helping to deconstruct stereotypes and clichés that frequently permeate traditional teaching materials. The proposal for a local textbook, based on the use of authentic texts and the flexibility offered by source materials, promotes a more dynamic learning environment that is attuned to students' realities. Furthermore, by encouraging critical reflection on language, culture, and social structures, the Zeitgeist project aligns with contemporary needs for the development of critically engaged citizens, capable of interacting with a language in constant transformation.

In essence, the project aims not only to provide an alternative to traditional models of German language education but also to establish a space for the collective construction of knowledge. The goal is for this didactic material to contribute to the formation of more autonomous, engaged teachers and students who are better prepared to face the complexities of the contemporary world, while considering the specificities and diversity that shape language teaching practices in Brazil. Ultimately, initiatives like Zeitgeist are part of a broader movement to reconceptualize educational materials through a critical, local, and emancipatory lens, in dialogue with Freirean pedagogy and decolonial perspectives.

It is important to note that producing authorial didactic material is a demanding process involving a wide range of knowledge and experiences. Major challenges include reconciling different opinions, viewpoints, and pedagogical needs, as well as securing enough time to dedicate to material development, considering that the authors (professors at public universities in Brazil) are generally not compensated for such work. Issues related to copyright of texts, audio, and images, as well as layout and graphic design, also require careful attention to ensure the final product meets quality standards.

Addressing these complexities is essential to ensure that the textbook not only meets pedagogical needs but also provides an enriching and contextualized learning experience for students of German in Brazil. The future prospects for the Zeitgeist project are promising. The first volume is currently in its review and pilot-testing phase in select classes, while the second volume is already in the early stages of development. It is expected that the outcomes from the partial implementation of the material will feed back into the creation process, allowing for continuous adjustments and improvements.

In the long term, it is hoped that Zeitgeist will inspire other initiatives focused on developing local educational materials for different languages and contexts, contributing to a shift in how we conceive and practice the teaching of

additional languages, a shift rooted in the appreciation of local context, social justice, and the formation of critical and reflective learners.

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