

# Written ability and level of literacy in writers from Rio Grande do Sul in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries\*

Habilidade na escrita e nível de letramento de escreventes do Rio Grande do Sul nos séculos séculos XIX e XX

Tatiana Keller 

Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, Santa Maria, RS, Brasil  
E-mail: tatianakeller.ufsm@gmail.com

## Abstract

Studies such as those by Marquilhas (2000), Barbosa (2005, 2017), Santiago (2012), among others, propose that it is possible to characterize the ability of a writer, that is, his/her greater or lesser familiarity with writing, based on the observation of physical-graphical and graphic and phonetic aspects. This kind of description allows us to identify the level of literacy of the writers, which can help to compose their socio-linguistic profiles, especially when documents produced by non-distinguished people are contemplated. In this paper, we analyze five manuscripts of four writers from the cities of Santa Maria and Silveira Martins, both located in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Southern Brazil), written in the late nineteenth century (1890) and early twentieth century (1901). These texts belong to the collection named *Junta Intendencial* of the Municipal Historic Archives of Santa Maria. The documents were photographed and

### Editors-in-chief

Marcus Dores  
Célia Lopes

### Guest Editors

Ana Pereira Ferreira  
Leonor Dias Garcia  
Ofélia Sequeira

### Dossier

Paleografia e  
Diplomática na senda  
das Humanidades  
Digitais: caminhos  
e propostas

### How to cite:

KELLER, Tatiana. Written ability and level of literacy in writers from Rio Grande do Sul in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Revista LaborHistórico, v.10, n.1, e63295 2024. doi: <https://doi.org/10.24206/lh.v10i1.63295>

\* This paper presents the results obtained in the scope of the research project *Sócio- história linguística do Rio Grande do Sul: manuscritos oitocentistas e novecentistas* (Sociolinguistic history of Rio Grande do Sul: 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts), registered under number 050876, in the Projects Office of the Arts and Letters Center of the Santa Maria Federal University.

transcribed faithfully in order to retain their original features. Issues related to the layout of the letters, the use of abbreviations, the substitution of segments (consonants and vowels), unconventional word segmentation, and the use of Latinized words were observed in the manuscripts so as to determine the closeness of the writers to the written code. In general, we found that all the writers have a low level of literacy.

### Keywords

Written ability, manuscripts from Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil), literacy, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### Resumo

Estudos como os de Marquilhas (2000), Barbosa (2005, 2017), Santiago (2012), entre outros, propõem que é possível caracterizar a habilidade de um escrevente, ou seja, sua maior ou menor familiaridade com a escrita, com base na observação de aspectos físico-gráficos e gráficos e fonéticos. Tal caracterização nos permite identificar o grau de letramento dos redatores o que pode auxiliar a compor seus perfis sociolinguísticos, especialmente quando tratamos de documentos produzidos por pessoas não-ilustres. Neste trabalho, analisamos cinco manuscritos de quatro redatores das cidades de Santa Maria e de Silveira Martins, ambas localizadas no estado do Rio Grande do Sul (Brasil), produzidos no fim do século XIX (1890) e início do XX (1901), pertencentes ao acervo *Junta Intendencial* do Arquivo Histórico Municipal de Santa Maria. Os documentos foram fotografados e transcritos de modo fiel a fim de preservar suas características originais. Foram observados nos textos os seguintes aspectos: traçado das letras, uso de abreviaturas, substituições de segmentos (consoantes e vogais), segmentação vocabular não-convencional e uso de formas etimologizadas, com o objetivo de identificar a proximidade dos redatores em relação ao código escrito. De modo geral, verificamos que todos os escreventes apresentam baixo nível de letramento.

### Palavras-chave

Habilidade dos escreventes, manuscritos do Rio Grande do Sul, letramento, séculos XIX e XX.

## Introduction

Telles (2008) points out that a text, besides its primarily communicative purpose, can reveal several characteristics of a language, especially if we take into account data from past sync that are available only by means of written documentation. In this way, Philology and Textual Criticism are relevant areas for linguistic studies,

since they supply valuable material for investigation, which is obtained through the selection, fixation and transmission of documents. In this sense, Telles (2008) states as well that a text is a document of linguistic facts and that, in order to use it as a research source, it is essential that it be reproduced conservatively, that is, that all paleographic and graphematic properties be preserved in its transcription. Spina (1977) calls this type of reproduction a *diplomatic edition*. The advantage of this type of edition, as attested by Cambraia (2005), lies precisely in the fact that all the characteristics of the original text are retained.

Thus, established on rigorously transcribed texts, it is possible to observe lapses in writing and variants of the writer, which can reveal the presence of linguistic phenomena and indicate greater or lesser ability for writing. With regard to ability, Marquilhas (2000: 235) calls writers that are unfamiliar with writing as having *unable hands* (*mãos inábeis*, in Portuguese) and describes them as “falantes estacionados em fase incipiente de aquisição da escrita”<sup>1</sup>. In this paper, on the basis on the proposals of Marquilhas (2000), Barbosa (2005, 2017) and Santiago (2012), we examine five manuscripts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from four writers in an attempt to identify the mastery of the written code of each of them. These documents were chosen because they were produced by non-illustrious people from different levels of schooling.

The paper is structured as follows: in section 1, an overview on writers’ inability and physical-graphical and graphic and phonetic aspects is given; in section 2, the guidelines for the edition of the manuscripts are detailed, besides that their facsimile and diplomatic editions are presented; in section 3, the manuscripts are analyzed bearing in mind the aspects outlined in section 1; in conclusion, in section 4 are the final remarks.

## Writers’ inability: physical-graphical and graphic and phonetic aspects

Studies such as those by Marquilhas (2000), Barbosa (2005, 2017), Santiago (2012), among others, defend that it is possible to characterize the ability of a writer, that is, his/her greater or lesser familiarity with writing, placed on the observation of physical-graphical and graphic and phonetic aspects. Inability in writing is associated with physical-graphical aspects, such as the absence of cursiveness, non-uniformity in the layout of the letters, disrespect for page margins, etc. because it is thought that people with more ability would have firmer strokes, more rounded and interconnected letters, and would have homogeneous cursiveness. Besides that, the presence of graphic and phonetic deviations, such as vowel raising, segment substitutions, unconventional

---

<sup>1</sup> “speakers stuck in an incipient phase of writing acquisition” (our translation).

word segmentation, may be an indication of low literacy of the writer, since it would show the influence of spoken language and his/her little intimacy with written texts.

For this work, not all the aspects explored by Marquilhas (2000), Barbosa (2005, 2017) and Santiago (2012) will be considered. Some adaptations were necessary to account for the analyzed sample. Because of that, in this paper, the following aspects were observed:

- a. physical-graphical: erasures.
- b. graphic and phonetic: unconventional word segmentation, use of Latinized words, use of abbreviations, and substitution of segments (vowels and consonants).

These aspects are detailed below.

## Physical-graphical aspects

### Erasures

In Figure 1, we offer an example of erasure: in the word *dozentos* (two hundred), the writer amended the wrong grapheme *s*, initially used, by *z*, the correct one<sup>2</sup>. This case shows hesitation about the appropriate way of spelling this word by the writer, which may expose his poor writing practice.

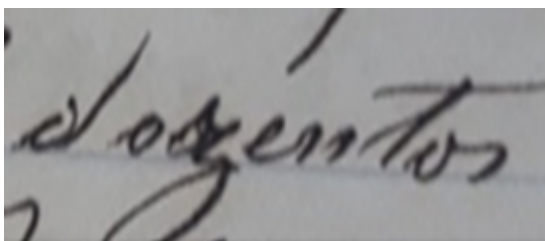


Figure 1. Erasure.

## Graphic and phonetic aspects

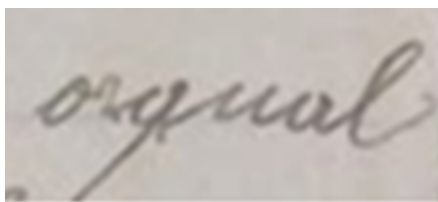
### Unconventional word segmentation

Blank spaces, before and after, delimit the written word. This delimitation, however, often does not coincide with the segmentation that happens in spoken language, which can cast doubts for individuals in the early stages of acquisition of writing. *Hyposegmentation* concerns the lack of a graphic boundary between the clitic and

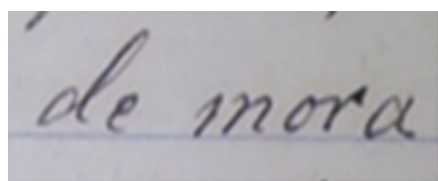
---

<sup>2</sup> The correct spelling of this word is *duzentos*. Besides the hesitation in choosing the correct form of the sibilant, the writer switches the vowel *u* by the vowel *o*, the so-called phenomenon of vowel lowering.

the word, as **oqual** (*o qual* – which) as is illustrated in Figure 2; *hypersegmentation* creates an undue space within the word, as **de mora** (*demora* – delay), as we can see in Figure 3.



**Figure 2.** Hyposegmentation.



**Figure 3.** Hypersegmentation.

Cunha and Miranda (2009), when analyzing unconventional segmentations of written productions of children in the early literacy stage, refer to that the instances of hyposegmentation may be linked to the notion that the child has about the size of a word and the influence of orality. On the length of words, the authors mention that sets of one or two letters are challenging for learners to recognize as autonomous words, so most of the time they attach these letters to the next word. Grammatical classes such as conjunctions and articles, pronouns and prepositions (unstressed monosyllables) are the most affected by this phenomenon. As for the influence of orality, the authors cite the observations of Abaurre, Galves and Scarpa (1999) that tone-syllable utterances are avoided in the speech acquisition process.

On the other hand, according to Cunha and Miranda (2009), with the development of the child's conceptualization of writing, as the notion about the size of a word begins to be overcome, structures that were improperly joined begin to be distinguished, and structures that should remain joined, especially in the initial syllable, may cause inadequate segmentation, that is hypersegmentation.

Research with texts written by people in the early literacy stage, such as those by Ferreira (2011) and Santos (2013), and with unable writers, such as those by Marquilhas (2000) and Santiago (2012), show results similar to those of children. Therefore, Santiago (2012) qualifies the non-mastery of this conventionality a feature of incipient acquisition of writing, since it is learned and refined through reading and writing activities. Hence unconventional segmentations are a consequence of the difficulty in getting the place of the blank space right.

### Use of Latinized words

Barbosa (2005) remarks that the process of etymologization, an attempt to reproduce the forms of Latin origin, was a resource used by writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century intending to ensure a higher level of literacy to the texts they wrote. Words spelled with geminate consonants (*anno* – year; *commo* – like), with mute h (*bum* – one), with *y* instead of *i* (*mayo* – May), among others, are examples of Latinized words. In accordance to Barbosa and Lima (2003) more skilled writers use more etymologized forms than less skilled writers.

### Use of abbreviations

On the word of Flexor (1990), the increased use of abbreviations over time is due to two factors: taking up less space, thanks to rarity and high cost of writing material, and saving time by writing faster. Nowadays, the habit of shortening words remains quite frequent, especially in digital media, and can be attributed to the need for a more agile written record. As stated by Spina (1977), abbreviations can be classified as:

- a. *acronym*: is formed from the first letters of a group of words, e.g., *UFESM* for *Universidade Federal de Santa Maria* (Santa Maria Federal University);
- b. *apocope*: suppression of the final letters of the word, e.g., *Gen.* for *General* (Army General);
- c. *syncope*: deletion of the characters in the middle of the word, e.g., *Dr.* for *Doutor* (Doctor);
- d. *overwriting letters*: overwriting the final letters of the word, e.g., *m<sup>ta</sup>* for *muita* (very);
- e. *special signs*: indication by means of special signs of letters that have been eliminated, e.g., the tilde indicating the suppression of the letters *ue* in *q̃* (*que* – that);
- f. *numeral letters*: abbreviation of a number by means of a letter, e.g., the use of the letter *I* by the Romans to represent the number 1.

Duchowny, Coelho, and Coelho (2014) list four reasons for the use of abbreviations in the documents they examine:

1. their use makes writing faster and more concise;
2. the abbreviation summarizes the word to the most important elements for its decoding which makes reading faster;
3. the format and frequency of abbreviations are attached to issues of time, fashion and the demands of the medium in which the word is conveyed; and
4. the use of abbreviations can be a way to embellish a text and offer signs that the writer has mastered the style of his time.

Coelho, Ramos, and Duchowny (2015) correlate these explanations to the possibility of measuring the level of literacy of a writer:

Se tais explicações são adequadas, poderemos depreender delas algo sobre o perfil social do escrevente que faz uso de abreviaturas: ele domina a escrita, na medida em que poderá executar sua tarefa com rapidez e concisão, restringindo-se aos elementos determinantes das palavras; é um bom leitor, na medida em que é capaz de construir seu texto em consonância com outros da época, além de sensível às especificidades do médium utilizado. Já a interpretação referente ao adorno do texto acrescenta um elemento novo, que manifesta atitude positiva em relação às abreviaturas, podendo levar a diferenças significativas quanto ao número de ocorrências nos diferentes textos (Coelho; Ramos; Duchowny, 2015 p. 336)<sup>3</sup>.

### Vowel substitutions

The instability in the realization of vowels, especially those in pretonic position, dates back to Vulgar Latin and lasts to the present. Such variability can be explained by the phonological process of *vowel raising* which consists in the replacement of a middle vowel with a high vowel as in *sigunda* rather than *segunda* (second) and *dumingo* rather than *domingo* (Sunday). This type of substitution may occur because of the influence of the spoken language.

### Consonantal substitutions

In written language is very common to alternate consonantal segments whose pronunciation is the same, for example, both consonants **s** and **z** in intervocalic position are pronounced as [z] in Portuguese, as in *vaso* (vase) and *vazar* (to leak out). This difference in spelling can only be explained by the etymology of the words or by spelling tradition.

## Method

In this paper, we analyze five manuscripts written in the cities of Santa Maria and Silveira Martins, located in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Southern Brazil), in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (1890) and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1901), with the aim of gathering

---

<sup>3</sup> If these explanations are adequate, we may deduce from them something about the social profile of the writer who makes use of abbreviations: he masters writing, to the extent that he can perform his task with speed and conciseness, restricting himself to the determining elements of the words; he is a good reader, to the extent that he is able to construct his text in line with others of the time, besides being sensitive to the specificities of the medium used. The interpretation referring to the adornment of the text adds a new element, which shows a positive attitude to abbreviations, and may lead to significant differences in the number of occurrences in different texts. (our translation).

physical-graphic and graphic and phonetic aspects that help us to reflect on the ability of the writers in writing<sup>4</sup>. The documents belong to the collection named *Junta Intendencial* of the Municipal Historical Archive of Santa Maria and were photographed with digital equipment and were selected because were produced by non-illustrious people from different levels of schooling.

In the following, we detail the procedures adopted in the editing of the manuscripts.

In conformity to Spina (1977), to edit a text is to reproduce it and this reproduction can be done in various ways depending, especially, on the audience to whom it is intended. In this paper, we display facsimile and diplomatic editions of manuscripts, which are reliable copies of the original texts and, therefore, may be of interest to specialists in areas such as linguistics, literature, and history.

In a facsimile edition, the image of a document is reproduced by mechanical means (photography, xerography, etc.) and transposed to another medium. It goes from paper (or parchment, depending on the period of the document) to the digital medium. For this edition to fulfill its role, it is necessary to use good image capturing equipment (camera or scanner), control environmental conditions (light, humidity), and handle the original with care (wearing a mask and gloves).

In a diplomatic edition, there is a conservative transcription of all the elements in the original text (abbreviations and punctuation marks, translineation, word segmentation, etc.). This type of edition has the advantage of exempting the reader from decoding the graphic forms of the original writing, a difficult task, especially when the document is handwritten. In order to do the diplomatic edition of a document, Cambraia (2005) proposes the subsequent guidelines, which are adopted in this work:

- a. transcribe with round Roman characters the characters, respecting the differences in modulus;
- b. reproduce diacritics, abbreviations, punctuation marks, separation of words, and paragraphing faithfully;
- c. put the characters of doubtful reading between simple round parentheses and register those of impossible reading as dots within brackets, preceded by a cross [†];
- d. inform in a footnote any erased characters, modified characters, between lines or in the margins, as well as ink and handle changes, or any other particularities;
- e. mark in the upper right margin the change of folio, side, or column, in italics and simple brackets;
- f. record the number of lines, counting from 5 to 5, in the left margin, continuously and throughout the text.

---

<sup>4</sup> A preliminary analysis of this corpus can be found in Keller (2019).



### Manuscripts: *facsimile* and diplomatic editions

Henceforth we present the facsimile edition and the diplomatic edition of each of the five manuscripts, as well as a summary of their contents.

Manuscript 1 (Figure 4) is a receipt from Manoel Vicente giving an account of services provided as a bricklayer for the *Intendência Municipal* (known as city hall today). The document was written in Santa Maria, on February 27, 1890.

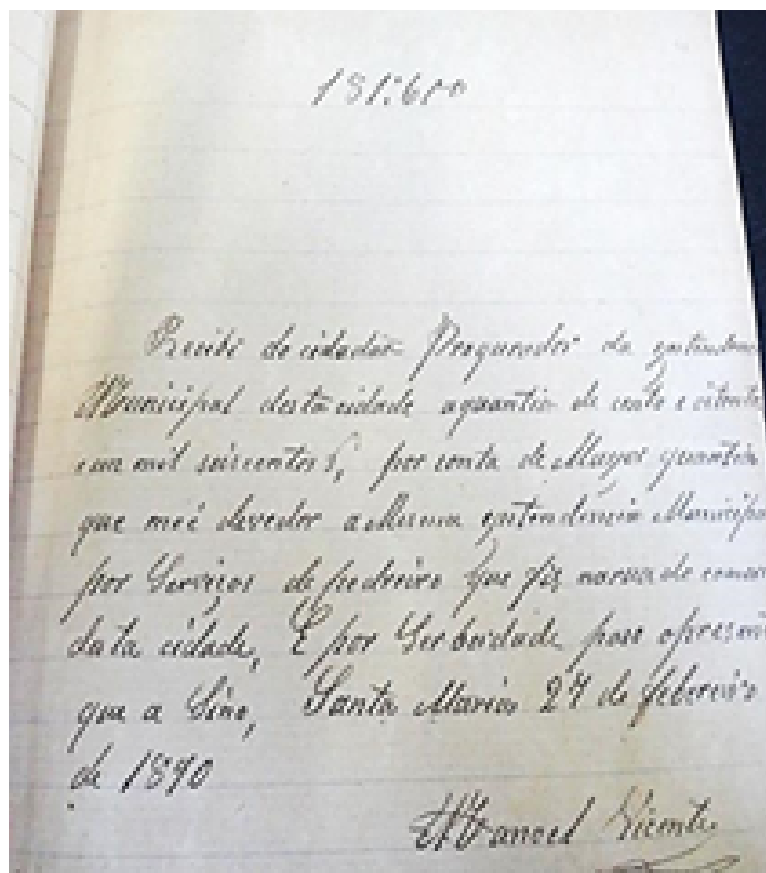


Figure 4. Manuscript 1, Writer #1.

The diplomatic edition of manuscript 1 is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Diplomatic edition of M1.

	181.600	[f.1]
	Recibi do cidadão Procurador da intendenci(a) Municipal desta cidade a quantia de cento e oitenta e um mil seiscentos r, por conta de Mayor quantia que me é devedor a Mesma Intendencia Municipa(l) por Serviços de pedreiro que fis narua do comer(cio) desta cidade, E por Ser berdade passo opresent(e) que a Sino, Santa Maria 27 de febreiro de 1890	
5		
10	Manoel Vicente	

In manuscript 2 (Figure 5), Manoel Vicente requests the *Intendência Municipal* to pay him the amount due for work done. The document was written in Santa Maria, on November 27 of the last decade of the year 1800.

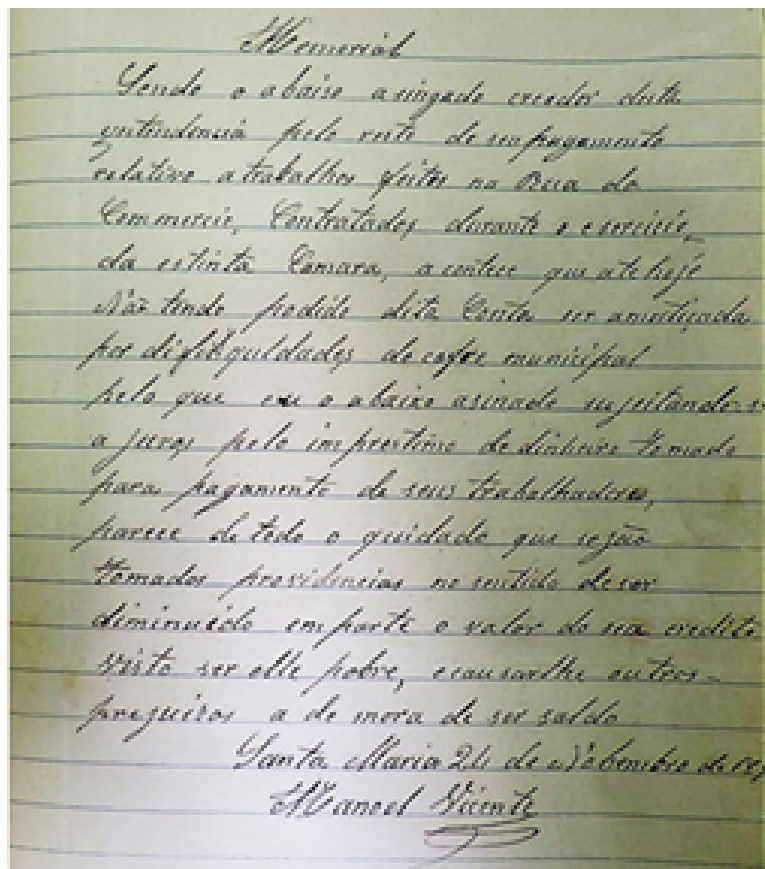


Figure 5. Manuscript 2, Writer#1.

The diplomatic edition of manuscript 2 is exhibited in Table 2.

Table 2. Diplomatic edition of M2.

	[f.1]
	Memorial
	Sendo o abaixo assingado credor desta
	intendencia pelo resto de seu pagamento
	relativo a trabalhos feitos na Rua do
5	Commercio, Contratados durante o exercicio
	da estinta Camara, acontece que ate hoje
	Não tendo podido dita Conta ser amortizada
	por difilquidades do cofre municipal
	pelo que eu o abaixo asinado sujeitando=s
10	a juros pelo imprestimo de dinheiro tomado
	para pagamento de seus trabalhadores,
	parece de todo o quidado que sejão
	tomadas providencias no sentido de ser
	diminuido em parte o valor do seo credito
15	visto ser elle pobre, e causarhe outros-
	prejuizos a de mora de ser saldo
	Santa Maria 24 de Nobembro de 1891
	Manoel Vicente

Manuscript 3 (Figure 6) is a receipt from Felipe Kümmel Filho reporting on a sum received for services rendered as administrator of the municipal cemetery. The document was written in Santa Maria, on September 30, 1890.

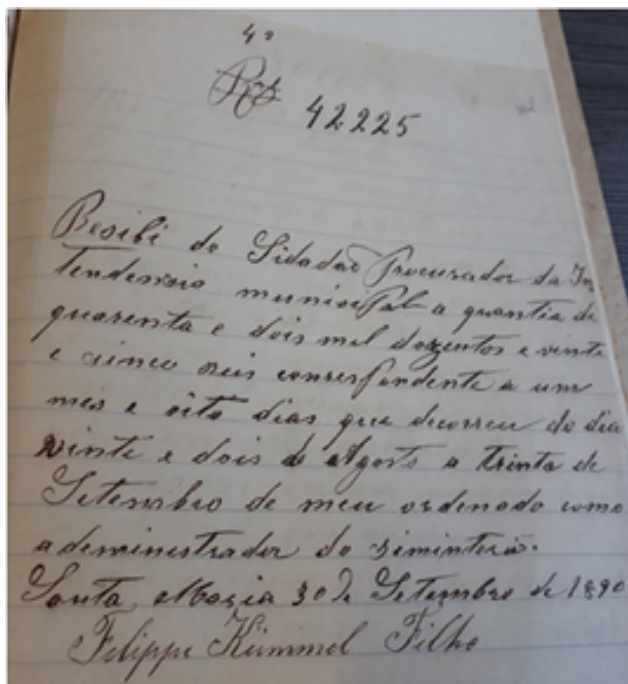


Figure 6. Manuscript 3, Writer#2.

The diplomatic edition of manuscript 3 is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Diplomatic edition of M3.

[f.1]
R 42225
Resibi do Sidadão Procurador da Intendencia municipal a quantia de quarenta e dois mil dozentos e vinte e cinco reis correspondente a um mes e oito dias que decorreu do dia vinte e dois de Agosto a trinta de Setembro de meu ordenado como administrador do simintério.
5
10
Santa Maria 30 de Setembro de 1890. Felipe Kümmel Filho

In manuscript 4 (Figure 7), Rodolpho Möring Niederauer informs the mayor (called *Intendente* at that time) of Santa Maria that he made a request for the construction of a road. The document was written in Silveira Martins (former colony of Santa Maria), on March 12, 1901.

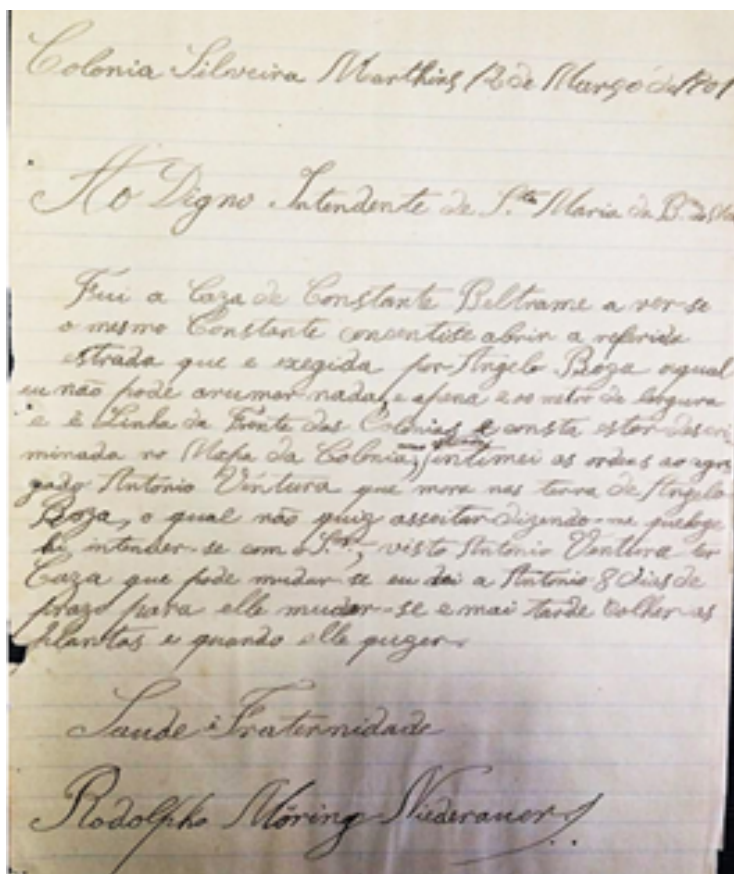


Figure 7. Manuscript 4, Writer#3.

The diplomatic edition of manuscript 4 is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Diplomatic edition of M4.

	Colônia Silveira Marthins 12 de Março de 1901	[f.1]
	Ao Digno Intendente de S. <sup>ta</sup> Maria da B. <sup>ca</sup> do Mo(n)te	
	Fui a Caza de Constante Beltrame a ver se o mesmo Constante consentise abrir a referida	
5	estrada que e exigida por Angelo Boza o qual eu não pode arumar nada, e apenas 200 metro de largura e e Linha da Frente das Colonias e consta estar discriminada no Mapa da colonia como estrada, intimei as ordens ao agregado Antonio Ventura que mora nas terra de Angelo	
10	Boza, o qual não quiz asseitar dizendo-me que hege hi entender-se com o S. <sup>to</sup> , visto Antonio Ventura ter Caza que pode mudar-se eu dei a Antonio 8 dias de prazo para elle mudar-se e mai tarde colher as plantas e quando elle quizer.	
15	Saude e Fraternidade	
	Rodolpho Möring Niederauer	

Manuscript 5 (Figure 8) is a receipt from Raphael Peres giving an account of services performed as a builder (or handyman) for the *Intendência Municipal*. The document was written on July 20, 1890.

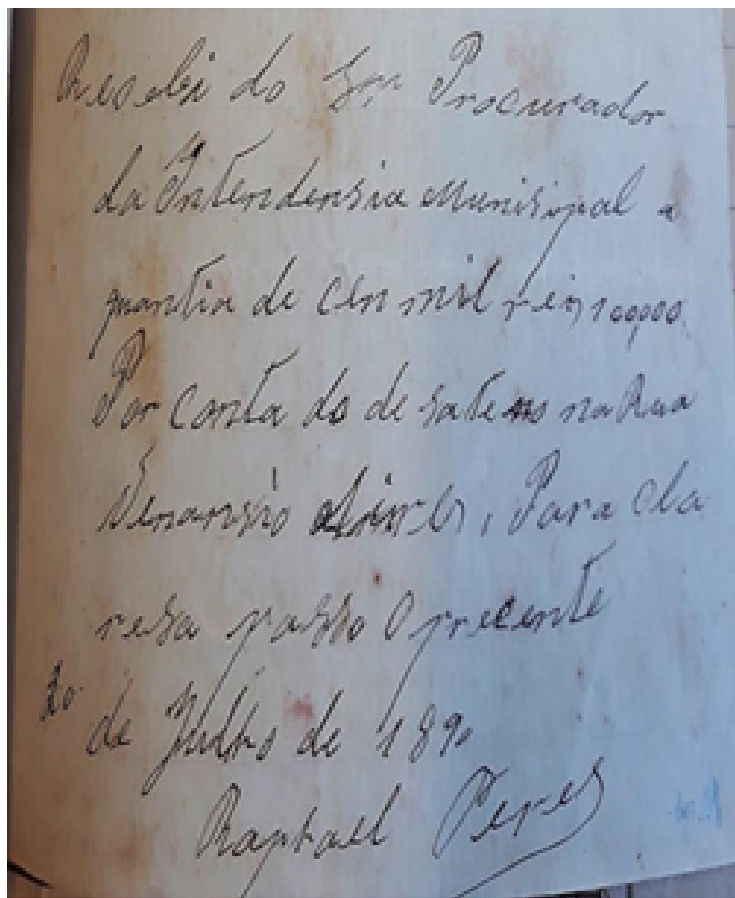


Figure 8. Manuscript 5, Writer#3.

The diplomatic edition of manuscript 5 is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Diplomatic edition of M5.

		[f.1]
	Resebi do Sr Procurador	
	da Intendencia Municipal a	
	quantia de cen mil reis 100,00	
	Por conta do de satero na Rua	
5	Venansio Aires, Para clareza	
	resa passo o presente	
	20 de Julho de 1890	
	Raphael Peres	

## Analysis

### Physical-graphical aspects

#### Erasures

All writers committed this graphic deviation as we can see in Table 6. Writer 1 spelled the word *dificuldades* (difficulties) with an *l* in the coda of the second syllable (*difilquidades*), non-existent in the spelling of the word, and when he realized the error he crossed out over the grapheme (t). Santiago (2012) found in her data the insertion of the graphemes *r* and *l* as a means of “dazzle” and attempts to get it right in writing. In connection to the lateral, the author checked out forms like *palpel* for *papel* (paper) and *pelsoal* for *peçoal* (personal). In addition to that, writer 2 fixes the graphemes *v* (in *vinte* – twenty) and *z* (in *dozentos* – two hundred); writer 3 erases the vowels *e* (in *dei* – I gave) and *a* (in *mudarse* – to move); finally, writer 4 makes erasures in the words *de satero* (*desaterro* – excavation) and *Aires*. Thus, the erasures are evidence of hesitation of the writer in relation to the correct spelling of the word, which suggest little contact with writing.

**Table 6.** Erasures.

Handwritten form	Current form	Manuscript - Writer
	<i>difilquidades</i> ( <i>dificuldades</i> ) - <i>difficulties</i>	M2 – W#1
	<i>dozentos</i> ( <i>duzentos</i> ) – <i>two hundred</i>	M3 – W#2
	<i>vinte</i> – <i>twenty</i>	M3 – W#2
	<i>eu dei</i> – I gave	M4 – W#3
	<i>mudar-se</i> – <i>to move out</i>	M4 – W#3
	<i>de satero</i> ( <i>desaterro</i> ) – <i>excavation</i>	M5 – W#4
	<i>Aires</i> – <i>Aires</i> ( <i>sumame</i> )	M5 – W#4

## Graphical and phonetic aspects

### Unconventional word segmentation

Three writers revealed divergences as for word segmentation as illustrated in Table 7. The samples of hyposegmentation are composed by the union of:

1. an article and a noun: **aquantia** (*a quantia* – the amount), **opresente** (*o presente* – the present);
2. a preposition and a noun: **narua** (*na rua* – on the street);
3. a verb and a pronoun: **causarlhe** (*causar-lhe* – to cause him);
4. a conjunction and an adverb: **quehoje** (*que hoje* – that today);
5. an article and a pronoun: **oqual** (*o qual* – which).

These occurrences are caused by the fact that the clitic (positioned to the right or to the left), which does not carry an accent, is supported by a grammatical word (name<sup>5</sup>, verb or adverb), which does carry an accent, forming a force group. In our data, is also possible to notice cases of hypersegmentation such as: *a sino* (*assino* – I sign), *de mora* (*demora* – delay) and *de satero* (*desaterro* – excavation).

**Table 7.** Unconventional word segmentation.

Handwritten form	Current form	Manuscript - Writer
	<b>aquantia</b> ( <i>a quantia</i> ) – the amount Hyposegmentation	M1 – W#1
	<b>opresente</b> ( <i>o presente</i> ) – the present Hyposegmentation	M1 – W#1
	<b>narua</b> ( <i>na rua</i> ) – on the street Hyposegmentation	M1 – W#1
	<b>causarlhe</b> ( <i>causar-lhe</i> ) – to harm you Hyposegmentation	M2 – W#1
	<b>quehoje</b> ( <i>que hoje</i> ) – that today Hyposegmentation	M4 – W#3
	<b>oqual</b> ( <i>o qual</i> ) – which Hyposegmentation	M4 – W#3
	<b>a sino</b> ( <i>assino</i> ) – I sign Hypersegmentation	M1 – W#1
	<b>de mora</b> ( <i>demora</i> ) – delay Hypersegmentation	M2 – W#1
	<b>de satero</b> ( <i>desaterro</i> ) – excavation Hypersegmentation	M5 – W#4

<sup>5</sup> Name encompasses the categories noun, adjective, pronoun and numeral.

Unconventional word segmentation is an important aspect to characterize a writer as less literate, since this orthographic variation reflects his poor mastery of written texts, as Marquilhas (2000) points out. Our data are in the same direction.

### Use of Latinized words

It is often not possible to trace the writer's socio-cultural profile and level of literacy. Therefore, Barbosa (2005) puts forward that by observing the usage and hit rate of Latinized words in texts, such as geminated consonants (*ella* – she), medial sequences of obstruents (*objecto* – object), and Latin graphemes (*catastrophe* – disaster), the writer's level of literacy can be measured. The use of various etymologized words may confirm that the writer has had more contact with written texts and, thus, has greater literacy, in line with Barbosa (2005).

In our data, it is possible to find geminate consonants in three writers: *commercio* (*comércio* – commerce) (M1, W#1), *elle* (*ele* – he) (M2, W#1 and M3, W#3). Besides that, we observe the usage of *y* instead of *i* in the word *Mayor* (*maior* – greater) by writer 1 and the presence of the consonantal cluster **gn** no longer used in the word *asigno* (*assino* – I sign) in manuscript 3.

There are only five Latinized words in the five manuscripts, a very small number, which may show, as claimed by Barbosa and Lima (2003), the low literacy level of the authors.

### Use of abbreviations

As we mentioned before, based on Coelho, Ramos, and Duchowny (2015), it is possible to relate the use of abbreviations to a higher degree of literacy of the writer, since this use demands from him, above all, knowledge of other texts and agility to perform the writing task. Moreover, the writer is aware that its use grants elegance and beauty to the text.

We detected that two of the writers, Rodolpho Niederauer (W#3) and Raphael Peres (W#4), had abbreviated forms as in (1) and (2):

- |     |   |       |
|-----|---|-------|
| (1) | S <sup>ta</sup> ( <i>Santa</i> ) – saint<br>B <sup>ca</sup> ( <i>Bocca</i> ) – place name<br>S <sup>or</sup> ( <i>Senhor</i> ) – mister | (W#3) |
| (2) | S <sup>nr</sup> ( <i>Senhor</i> ) – mister  | (W#4) |

It is important to notice that, among all the types of abbreviations defined by Spina (1977), we only found cases of syncope and overwriting.

These results, the absence of abbreviations in two of the writers and a limited list in the other two, demonstrate a low degree of literacy among the writers.



### Vowel substitutions

Such substitutions were made by three writers. These cases are listed in (3), (4) and (5):

- (3) *recibi (recebi)* – I received (W#1)  
*imprestimo (empréstimo)* – loan
- (4) *resibi (recebi)* – I received (W#2)  
*siminterio (cemitério)* – cemetery
- (5) *intender-se (entender-se)* – to get along (W#3)

Authors such as Bisol (1981) and Mattos e Silva (1991), among others, assume that the instability in the realization of the middle vowels /e, o/ as /i, u/ in the pretonic position, common in current Portuguese, already occurred in Vulgar Latin as the data extracted from the Appendix Probi (4th century AD) corroborate: *dysentericus non dysintericus*, *senatus non sinatus*, *palearium non paliarium*, *festuca non fistuca*, *formica non furmica*, *robigo non rubigo*.

This variation may be related to speech phenomena such as vowel harmony and vowel raising.

In the process of voiced harmony, the middle vowels /e, o/ are realized as /i, u/ in the presence of a following high vowel, as *recibi (recebi)* and *siminterio (cemitério)*.

Furthermore, there are cases in which pretonic middle vowels are pronounced high even without the presence of a high vowel in adjacent syllables as *imprestimo (empréstimo)* and *intender-se (entender-se)*. Bisol (1981) reports that the vowel *e* in initial position followed by a nasal or sibilant is categorically realized as a high vowel in spoken present-day Portuguese.

The presence of any of these cases may indicate influence of orality on writing and, consequently, less mastery of the difference between the conventions of speech and writing.

## Consonantal substitutions

Table 8 illustrates the consonantal substitutions found in the manuscripts of the four writers.

**Table 8.** Consonantal substitutions.

Substitution	Occurrences	Manuscript – Writer
s → z /z/	<i>fis</i> ( <i>fiz</i> ) – I did <i>claresa</i> ( <i>clareza</i> ) – clarity	M1 – W#1 M5 – W#4
z → s /z/	<i>caza</i> ( <i>casa</i> ) – house <i>quiz</i> ( <i>quis</i> ) – I wanted <i>quizer</i> ( <i>quiser</i> ) – I want	M4 – W#3
s → x /z/	<i>esercicio</i> ( <i>exercício</i> ) – exercise	M2 – W#1
ç → z /z/	<i>amortiçada</i> ( <i>amortizada</i> ) – depreciated	M2 – W#1
c → s /z/	<i>precente</i> ( <i>presente</i> ) – present	M5 – W#4
s → c /s/	<i>sidadão</i> ( <i>cidadão</i> ) – citizen <i>siminterio</i> ( <i>cemitério</i> ) – cemitério <i>resebi</i> ( <i>recebi</i> ) – I received <i>Intendensia</i> ( <i>Intendência</i> ) – city hall <i>municipal</i> ( <i>municipal</i> ) – municipal	M3 – W#2 M5 – W#4
s → x /s/	<i>estinta</i> ( <i>extinta</i> ) – extinct	M2 – W#1
s → ss /s/	<i>paso</i> ( <i>passo</i> ) – I pass <i>asinado</i> ( <i>assinado</i> ) – I signed <i>concentise</i> ( <i>consentisse</i> ) – I conceded	M2 – W#1 M4 – W#3
c → s /s/	<i>concentise</i> ( <i>consentisse</i> ) – I conceded	M4 – W#3
v → b	<i>berdade</i> ( <i>verdade</i> ) – truth <i>febreiro</i> ( <i>fevereiro</i> ) – February <i>nobembro</i> ( <i>novembro</i> ) – November	M1 – W#1 M2 – W#1
c → q /k/	<i>Procurador</i> ( <i>Procurador</i> ) – state's attorney <i>quidado</i> ( <i>cuidado</i> ) – care <i>difitquidades</i> ( <i>dificuldades</i> ) – difficulties	M1 – W#1 M2 – W#1

The consonants **s**, **z**, **ç**, **x** and **c** in the words *fis* (*fiz*), *claresa* (*clareza*), *esercicio* (*exercício*), *caza* (*casa*), *quiz* (*quis*), *quizer* (*quiser*), *amortiçada* (*amortizada*), and *precente* (*presente*) equate to the pronunciation of the same phoneme, /z/, which may cause difficulty for a writer less accustomed to writing, because the difference in spelling between these words must be “memorized” since it is a spelling convention. The same can be said about the exchange between the graphemes **s**, **c**, **x** and **ss**, which correspond to the phoneme /s/, in the words *sidadão* (*cidadão*), *siminterio* (*cemitério*), *resebi* (*recebi*), *Intendensia* (*Intendência*), *municipal* (*municipal*), *estinta* (*extinta*), *paso* (*passo*), *asinado* (*assinado*), *concentise* (*consentisse*).

Regarding the sibilants **s**, **z**, **ss**, **ç**, **ch** and **x**, Cardeira (2003) conceives that during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century there are several examples of graphic confusion between these graphemes which could be observed in documents from monasteries in the Northwest and in those of the Lisbon region. The author also states that this confusion continues into the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Paiva (2008:178-179) mentions that “por volta de 1550 começa a haver confusão entre os fonemas, grafando-se ç

por ss ou ss por ç; s por z e vice-versa. Daí as dificuldades que ainda se encontram hoje na grafia de sons semelhantes como ç e ss e s intervocálico e z”<sup>6</sup>.

Table 8 also portrays the variation between **b** and **v**, in words *berdade* (*verdade*) – truth, *febereiro* (*fevereiro*) – February, *nobembro* (*novembro*) – November, but it cannot be explained in the way described above. Mattos e Silva (1991) comments that since Galician-Portuguese there is variation between these two consonants, which can also be verified in current Portuguese pronunciations: *[b]assoura* x *[v]assoura* – broom, *[b]erruga* x *[v]erruga* – wart. The alternation in our data may reflect this inconstancy between the two consonants.

Finally, the change between **c** and **q**, as in *Proqurador* (*Procurador*), *quidado* (*cuidado*) and *difiquldades* (*dificuldades*) is exposed in Table 8. This variation may be aligned to the fact that the consonant **c** is followed by the vowel **u**, as happens when the sequence **qu** is used. Paiva (2008: 180) adds that in archaic Portuguese, this alternation was frequent: *corenta* (*quarenta* – forty), *coresma* (*quaresma* – Lent), *nunqua* (*nunca* – never), *cinquo* (*cinco* – five) since they have the same pronunciation: /k/. Currently, Portuguese exhibits alternating forms like *quotidiano* - *cotidiano* (everyday), *quociente* - *cociente* (ratio).

## Final remarks

Table 9 provides a summary of the aspects related to writers’ inability considered in this research.

**Table 9.** Summary.

<b>Observed aspects</b>	<b>W#1</b>	<b>W#2</b>	<b>W#3</b>	<b>W#4</b>
<u>Erasures</u>	x	x	x	x
<u>Unconventional word segmentation</u>	x		x	x
<u>Use of Latinized words</u>	x	x	x	
<u>Use of abbreviations</u>		x		x
<u>Vowel substitutions</u>	x	x	x	
<u>Consonantal substitutions</u>	x	x	x	x

Based on these results, we argue that the four authors can be defined as *unable hands* (according to Marquilhas (2000)) since they have most of the characteristics

<sup>6</sup> “around 1550, there began to be confusion between the phonemes, spelling ç for ss or ss for ç; s for z and vice-versa. Hence the difficulties that are still encountered today in spelling similar sounds like ç and ss and intervocalic s and z” (our translation).

adopted to describe people with poor mastery of the written code. This kind of description allows us to identify the level of literacy of the writers, which can help to compose their socio-linguistic profiles, especially when documents produced by non-distinguished people are contemplated. It is also possible to extend this methodology in order to characterize the greater or lesser familiarity with writing to other groups regardless the period of time in which the text has been produced.

## References

- ABAURRE, M. B.; GALVES, C.; SCARPA, E. (1999). “A interface fonologia/ sintaxe. Evidências do português brasileiro para uma hipótese *top-down* na aquisição da linguagem”. In: SCARPA, E. (org.). *Estudos de Prosódia no Brasil*. Campinas: Unicamp. p. 285-320.
- BARBOSA, A. G. (2005). “Tratamento dos corpora de sincronias passadas da língua portuguesa no Brasil: recortes grafológicos e linguísticos”. In: LOPES, C. R. dos S. (org.). *Norma brasileira em construção: fatos linguísticos em cartas pessoais do século XIX*. Rio de Janeiro: Pós-Graduação em Letras Vernáculas; FAPERJ, p. 761-780.
- BARBOSA, A. G. (2017). O controle de marcas de inabilidade na escrita alfabética e a identificação das *mãos inábeis* em *corpora* histórico-diacrônicos. *Revista da ABRALIN*, v.16, n.2, p. 19-43.
- BARBOSA, A. G.; LIMA, C. da S. (2003). Aspectos grafemáticos e culturais em manuscritos do século XIX: critérios para a construção de corpora contrastivos do português. *Revista Philologus*, v. 25, p. 6-20.
- BISOL, L. (1981). *Harmonia vocálica: uma regra variável*. 332 f. Tese (Doutorado em Linguística) – Faculdade de Letras, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro.
- CAMBRAIA, C. N. (2005). *Introdução à crítica textual*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.
- CARDEIRA, E. (2003). “Alguns dados sobre o sistema de sibilantes do português”. In CASTRO, I.; DUARTE, I. (eds.). *Razões e emoção*. Miscelânea de estudos oferecida a Maria Helena Mateus. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda. Vol. I, p. 129-145.
- COELHO, S. M.; RAMOS, J. M.; DUCHOWNY, A. T. (2015). Processos e mudanças em abreviaturas mineiras setecentistas: regularidade e ruptura. *Filologia e Linguística Portuguesa*, São Paulo, v. 17, n. 2, p. 333-352.
- CUNHA, A. P. N. da; MIRANDA A. R. M. (2009). A hipo e a hipersegmentação nos dados de aquisição de escrita: a influência da prosódia. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v. 53, n. 1, p. 127-148.
- DUCHOWNY, A. T.; COELHO, S. M.; COELHO, G. H. (2014). Sistema de abreviaturas de documentos adamantinos setecentistas. *Revista Letras*, v. 90, p. 233-252.
- FERREIRA, C. R. G. (2011). *Um estudo sobre a segmentação não-convencional na aquisição da escrita de alunos de EJA*. 2011. 163 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) – Universidade Federal de Pelotas.

FLEXOR, M. H. O. (1990). *Abreviaturas*. Manuscritos dos séculos XVI ao XIX. 2 ed. São Paulo: Arquivo do Estado.

KELLER, T. (2019). A habilidade dos escreventes em manuscritos do Rio Grande do Sul do fim do século XIX. *ReVEL*, v. 17, n. 32, p. 43-68.

MARQUILHAS, R. (2000). *A Faculdade das Letras: Leitura e escrita em Portugal no séc. XVII*. Lisboa: IN-CM, (Filologia Portuguesa).

MATTOS E SILVA, R. V. (1991). *O português arcaico: fonologia*. São Paulo: Contexto.

PAIVA, D. de F. (2008). “Século XV e meados do século XVI”. In: SPINA, S. (org.). *História da Língua Portuguesa*. Cotia, SP: Ateliê Editorial, p. 147-275.

SANTIAGO, H. da S. (2012). *Um estudo do português popular brasileiro em cartas pessoais de “mãos cândidas” do sertão baiano*. 2v. Feira de Santana, 2012. Dissertação (Mestrado em Estudos Linguísticos) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Linguísticos, Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana.

SANTOS, M. P. de L. B. dos. (2013). *Um estudo sobre a segmentação não-convencional de palavras, frases e textos por adultos e crianças em processo de alfabetização*. 78p. Dissertação de Mestrado, Pós-Graduação em Psicologia Cognitiva. Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Recife, 2013.

SPINA, S. (1977). *Introdução à edótica*. São Paulo: Cultrix.

TELLES, C. M. (2008). Textos escritos por mãos inábeis, sua importância para o estudo da fonologia. *Calidoscópio*, v. 28-36.