

METACOGNITIVE KNOWLEDGE, FRAMEWORKS FOR MEANING CONSTRUCTION AND PORTUGUESE TEACHING-LEARNING

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- **ABSTRACT:** This paper proposes the concept of frameworks for meaning construction in written texts, related to the dimensions of people's experiences expressed in lexical-grammatical text structure: genre, register, field, tenor and modality. These frameworks are observed in the analysis of a dissertative-argumentative text which does not correspond to any of the expected frameworks for the type of text required. The same text is presented to 80 High School students, and their comments reveal the level of quality of their metalinguistic knowledge: an understanding of language which is limited to the word level; the perception of register, but not of other frameworks; the limitation to linear-superficial text aspects: orthography, punctuation etc., and the textual perspective as object-language, and not metalanguage. From these facts, we proceed to some claims about the current conditions of the teaching and learning of Brazilian students' mother tongue in Brazil by taking into consideration the knowledge that they have been constructing about language.
- **KEYWORDS:** Discursive and textual genres. Metalinguistic development. Language teaching-learning. Text production.

Introduction

The reflection concerning the teaching of Portuguese as a mother tongue has been experiencing a new and great impetus since the late nineties in the last century in Brazil. This impulse was afforded in 1998 by the National Curricular Parameters (in Portuguese, PCNs) for Portuguese teaching-learning, as the official document to provide a unified national view regarding goals, methods and instruments for the teaching and learning of Portuguese in Brazilian schools.

The PCNs were designed, among other perspectives, from discussions about the need to observe every linguistic materiality related to the social and contextual conditions of language production in written and oral texts. In this sense, the conceptualization of the expression "uses of language" employed by the PCNs would henceforth include the resources and structures required to text construction.

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For the conceptual elaboration of the PCNs, the relationship between the texts as the central tool of language teaching-learning and the choice for the “public uses of language” (BRASIL, 1998, p.24) led to the adoption of the concept of *text/discourse genres*. They were related to the recognition and legitimation of the situated production of language, and incorporated to the new education paradigms subsumed within the PCNs’ formulation and implementation. This adoption has come in opposition to the traditional view of Portuguese teaching-learning, guided by lexical-grammatical description, the linear, superficial and rudimentary treatment of the texts, and the lack of connections between language and the discursive practices related to it.

The PCNs were primarily based on the Bakhtinian ideas about language and discourse, and about the genres as the main objects of investigation. Bakhtin’s propositions, although not originally constructed aiming at the language teaching-learning process, were added without any problems to the PCNs’ proposals of establishing, as a teaching-learning matter, the real life uses of language.

In the PCNs’ implementation of the genre perspective for Portuguese teaching-learning, it is possible to identify a process of *re-enunciation* (GOMES-SANTOS, 2004, p.112) of the concept of genre. It means that the concept of genre was transposed from the academic scope to reach a political scope, related to pedagogical and didactic constraints that would guide not only all teaching-learning goals, but also the editorial and educational business. To some extent, this re-enunciation was inevitable, given that the discourse-oriented definition of Bakhtinian theory brings together the idea that every language production is brand new, unique and unrepeatable. In Bakhtin words,

[...] An effective and correct method of practical teaching demands that the form be assimilated not in the abstract language system, i. e., as a form always identical to itself [in other words: never referring to a larger system of meaning]¹, but in the concrete structure of enunciation, as a flexible and variable sign. (BAKHTIN, 1988 apud RODRIGUES, 2005, p.153).

Bakhtin’s proposition is a challenge for researchers on Portuguese teaching-learning didactics as well as for language educators in general: they need to recognize the uniqueness of every discourse event and the language produced while acting with it in the social world, but they also need to operate with a minimum of generalization perspectives in order succeed in their findings.

One of the solutions for this didactic task would be, according to Rodrigues (2005), keeping in figure, in a teaching-learning event, not the *enunciative* facet

¹ Additions made by the Author of this paper.

of language uses, which particularizes them, but their *textual* facet, in which the linguistic forms are reiterated and can be also identified in other enunciations.

But this double-facet proposal still keeps one of the greatest defiances to those who address and study the issues related to Portuguese teaching-learning as a mother tongue under the validity of the PCNs: how to optimize teaching-learning within the enunciative context where texts are produced; and, above all, how to proceed to a necessary language opacity and abstraction (GOMBERT, 1990). Therefore, we need to go towards an understanding of the lexicon and the grammar, but without losing track of the fact that what is being analysed is part of a semiotic construction which involves other elements as well.

To the Portuguese teacher, this problem can be materialized in the following questions: how can we observe lexical and grammatical forms of Portuguese, as they constitute an intended enunciation? How can we demonstrate the enunciative and discursive aspects of a text through the choice of a lexical or grammatical form to the detriment of others? Moreover, how can we attest, in discursive terms, whether the use of a specific form is adequate or not when taking the need to consider the great variation of language uses?

The issue that we are discussing in this paper does not emerge if we take, as the PCNs do, the nature of the object to be taught as the focus for teaching-learning. Rather, it emerges if we think about teaching-learning in terms of improving the quality of people's linguistic experiences, and if we deviate the focus of the discussion about language teaching-learning. By doing this, we no longer focus on *language*, as teachers normally do, but focus on who actually uses language, which implies considering knowledges that people construct about it. From this reorientation of perspective, we can identify problems arising from the bad quality of some knowledges caused by the learners' precarious reflection and action over the language features they are employing, and over the variables at stake when they are engaged in linguistic and discursive actions at school. In other words, the problem that we are focusing in this paper concerns the concept of *metalinguistic knowledge* (BIALYSTOK, 1986; GOMBERT, 1990; KARMILOFF-SMITH et al., 1996; TOLCHINSKY, 2000; CORREA, 2004; HOMER, 2009). This concept is related to the metalinguistic development brought about by every new experience with language, be it the learning of a new language (DIAZ, 1983), be it the learning of a new language variant of an already acquired language (RAVID; TOLCHINSKY, 2002).

This paper seeks to frame the issue that we are considering up to this point: the didactic treatment given, in studies of learning and metalinguistic development, to the double facet of language practices mentioned by Rodrigues (2005): the enunciative one and the textual one. We do this in order to outline some actions to help students and teachers overcome their difficulties while

dealing with texts as real life language objects, and in order to undertake didactic procedures to stimulate and keep “the speaker’s active stance in this or that field of object and process of meaning-making” (BAKHTIN, 1988 apud RODRIGUES, 2005, p.159).

In order to do so, we propose a discussion about metalinguistic knowledge and text teaching-learning in schools by means of materializing the double facet of language use in the *frameworks of meaning that emerge in text construction*. These frameworks are related to the understanding, by the language user, of how texts come to existence and are included in five validation parameters for the linguistic meanings they convey: the textual *genres*, the *tenor* of the interaction, the *field* of common knowledge among the interactants, the *register*, and the *modality* in which texts are constructed. Although these frameworks constitute an open compilation, in this paper, we identify only those that are systematically representative of the lexical-grammatical structure of texts.

Our approach seeks to discuss the possibility of a language teaching-learning process which can reveal it as a part of the experience of the person with language. It takes into account the fact that the conscious and contextualized linguistic use must rely on the knowledge of the lexical-grammatical composition of texts. This proposal is a possible strategy of acting and facing the challenge offered by Bakhtin’s proposition: to develop a way of language teaching-learning which can help learners be aware as much as possible of the interactions among language forms, meanings, and situated relations that we expect language to convey and reveal.

The inclusion of the problem presented in this paper among the studies on language and metalinguistic development allows us to recognize the double facet of language practices – on the one hand, its fortuitous and fugitive facet, relative to the statements as discursive-social actions; and, on the other hand, its facet relative to texts as linguistic manifestations of these actions. From this recognition, we can propose a teaching-learning approach focused not on the knowledge of nomenclatures and categories, but on metalinguistic attitudes, based on a mature observation, by the person, about his/her linguistic actions, as posed by Bialystok and Ryan (1985, p.208-209):

1. The “analysis of linguistic knowledge in structured categories”: word, argument structure, sentence, text etc.
2. The “control of attentional procedures to select and process specific linguistic information” – for grammar: the organization of the categories quoted in 1. For text construction: production, interpretation, judgement, correction, remaking, identification.

Bialystok and Ryan's remarks lie on the idea that, besides the knowledge of linguistic categories and construals, learners have to be aware of how language is produced, and how the lexical-grammatical features are directly related to their conditions of use. We assume this idea as one of the main goals of mother tongue teaching-learning process (as well as foreign language, we need to say). Its corollaries must be valorized in every practice that aims at improving the linguistic skills and metalinguistic abilities of learners. However, to accomplish this task, we must take into consideration that metalinguistic knowledge is not an epiphenomenon of literacy; therefore, we must not naturalize it. Rather, such as happens to other variables involved in literacy development, we must problematize it in terms of how the conditions of possibilities in school enable, inhibit or preclude it.

Keeping these considerations in mind, in this paper we will observe how we can help our students to become capable of evaluating their own texts and the texts of other people. This evaluation would include their knowledge of the linguistic materiality – lexicon, grammar – that constitute every enunciative and discursive action, specifically those linguistic structures studied in school.

In order to fulfill this purpose, we will first present our definition for the frameworks for the linguistic meanings considered in this paper. This definition will lead us to implement two courses of action: first, the evaluation of a dissertative-argumentative text sent to the text examining board offered to students by the Brazilian website *uol (universe on line)*; second, the discussion of this same text, which was afterwards presented to 80 public High-School students of the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. We will focus on the detection of their perception level of the frameworks, as well as their metalinguistic comprehension of the lexical-grammatical aspects of the text. It is necessary to consider their level of metalinguistic comprehension because this capacity is a pre-requisite for them to recognize the frameworks defined in this article. Our comments will be developed upon their analytical actions related to the problem that this article proposes to examine.

The frameworks for textual meaning construction– genre, register, tenor of interaction, field of knowledge, and modality

Ravid and Tolchinsky (2002, p.424, emphasis added), when proposing the concept of *linguistic literacy*, stated that “Language users do not participate in uniform linguistic circumstances. Rather, they need to vary their production to mark three situationally defined varieties: *register*, *genre*, and *modality*”. However, besides those three variables proposed by Ravid and Tolchinsky, if we interrelate the plurality of linguistic experiences to the possibilities of marking

them lexical-grammatically, we will attest that the relative position of the people engaged in a communication event – the *tenor* of the communication – and the amount of common and not common knowledge to the interactants – the *field* of the communication - are contextual conditions which go beyond linguistic materiality. For this reason, they are central elements in this article, given that we intend to observe the didactic perspective of language discursive dimension.

Furthermore, the action of combining these five frameworks is justified by the fact that, although they are not found together in other conceptual prescriptions, we can treat them similarly because they represent linguistic marks of the variable enunciations produced by people, and for this reason, we can see them as playing a very important and constitutive capillary role in communication.

We can enumerate two advantages in assuming the frameworks for linguistic meaning construction as part of teaching-learning didactics of writing and reading texts of all genres:

1. Their employment as a didactic instrument allows us to handle the stable facet of texts as discursive actions without losing track of their local facet. However, in order to accomplish this task, we need to change the focus given to language teaching-learning: from discourse, which has been usually done, to the people who produce it. This could help students understand the frameworks that we are discussing, in this paper, as related to their knowledge about language. It means that the frameworks are not things that exist *in* texts; they are forms of insertion, in language, of the meanings that people wish to construct.
2. The concept of frameworks does not neglect writing as a social practice, but it allows us to deal with the fact that the linguistic materiality is an important object for us to detect, in the texts produced by our students, the quality of their knowledge about language, and the consistency of their reflections concerning the discursive practices they are engaged in. This makes them recognize themselves as discursive actors in the school institution, and observe the meanings they produce as social and situated actions (GERHARDT, 2013). In fact, the mere act of understanding linguistic meaning, without any appropriate verification of how it is grammatically structured, is not satisfactory for a good linguistic comprehension (BOWEY, 1986).

In the lines below, we will define properly the frameworks presented in this article. What we are going to say about them will be useful for the evaluation of a dissertative-argumentative written text sent to the website *uol*, in order to fulfill the proposal made by the website examination board. After that, we will present and comment what the students wrote about it.

Genre

In the amount of textual studies performed by Brazilian scholars, the contemporary view of genres has been able to comprise, without any serious theoretical problem, several perspectives about language and discourse, besides the traditional school understanding of genres (BRAIT, 2000; ROJO, 2005). Despite their differences of focus, these perspectives keep among themselves the premise of the constitutive relationships between language and discourse. Besides Bakhtinian studies, another important source of genre discussion is offered by Halliday e Hasan (1985), who have directed some interpretations about the concept of genres in Systemic-functional Linguistics (EGGINS, 2004) and in Psycholinguistics (TOLCHINSKY, 2000; RAVID; TOLCHINSKY, 2002). Our proposal of thinking about genres lines up with these studies.

Following the basic assumptions of Systemic-functional Linguistics for the study of textual coherence, Eggin postulates the need to recognize the continuity between text and context, establishing genre as the “context of culture in text” (EGGINS, 2004, p.54). Eggin refers to genre as the “dimension of contextual coherence” at the macrosocial level: the dimension that defines the purposes of a given way of saying in the culture in which this saying is included.

Following a slightly different path, Tolchinsky (2000) and Ravid and Tolchinsky (2002) have chosen the focus assumed in this paper, discussing genre as a linguistic experience defined through a microsocial approach, i.e., attached to local contexts. In other words, these authors understand genres by focusing on how the situation in which they were produced and their communicative purposes are expressed in texts. Tolchinsky (2000, p.39) claims, “Genre can be seen as a register plus purpose. That is, it includes the more general idea of what the interactants are doing through language, and how they organize the language event in order to achieve that purpose”.

As to metalinguistic development (RAVID; TOLCHINSKY, 2002), the enlargement of the inventory of textual genres available to the person’s linguistic understanding and practice is related to the increasing possibility, along his/her school and everyday life, of his/her conscious observation and exploration of the relations among genres.

If we understand genres in the light of the situated perspective of Cognitive Science, which has considered the goals of cognitive actions as one of the structuring factors of meaning construction (GERHARDT, 2014), we can say that the idea of purpose attached to the generic dimension of texts grants to genre the prevalence over other frameworks. In fact, learners, as they engage in the task of understanding texts, can easily define tenor, field, modality and register from the establishment of genre. Therefore, if we take the fact that there is no didactic

consideration about this issue in Portuguese teaching-learning research, the comprehension of the genres studied in school turns out to result very precarious, as we will see in this paper.

Register

According to Eggins (2004), register is the consideration of the microsocial level in the construction of textual coherence, besides the macrosocial level that defines its genre. Eggins asserts that the constitutive relationship between text and context explores, in a great deal, the scarcity of linguistic materiality, and it permits register to define even the referential, explicit meaning of the enunciation. The author considers the frameworks tenor and field as taking part of the immediate context of the text, as composing the major discussion about register. However, as tenor and field participate in the lexical-grammatical outlines of texts, in this paper we treat them as two independent and different aspects.

For Ravid and Tolchinsky (2002), register, as a framework for text meaning construction, is a feature of the comprehension of how some parameters of interpersonal relationships, such as symmetry/asymmetry, politeness, and degree of intimacy, pervade every text. This idea has led the authors to connect the concept of register to its usual approach: the levels of formality in personal relationships interfering in language construction and communication. It is in this sense that we are observing the term *register* in this paper; we will verify that, given the inclusion of register among the curricular contents for Portuguese teaching-learning, it is a component frequently taken into consideration by students when keeping contact with texts in school.

Tenor

Halliday e Hasan (1985) define tenor according to its functional perspective, and in a way similar to Ravid and Tolchinsky's definition of register: the level and the degree of institutionalization of the relationships among people crosses every language production and communication, revealing similarities and differences as well as engendering them. In this paper, we also relate tenor to these factors - not in an institutional sense, assigned here to register, but in a more materialistic and physical sense. We assume the concept of tenor taking into account the relative positions of people when they engage in a given form of communication. It implies a continuous interactional gradation: from the online and real time condition of a conversation, passing through all the possibilities of oral or written communication, to the production and interpretation of texts among people without any visual or auditory contact, and without any synchronicity. Depending on the tenor, the

enunciations produced, as well as the interactants, assume different conditions: in oral or written communication more or less online, they are interlocutors; in offline communication, they are writers, readers; in oral events without turn-takings, they are speakers, listeners.

We already know that pragmatics and grammar are closely related (GIVÓN, 1979): the more offline the communication event, the more referential and grammatical elements we must offer in order to accomplish the task of conveying, in a reliable way, the meanings that our absence does not allow us to transmit. Having in mind such conditions is an important feature for metalinguistic research.

Field

In Systemic-functional Linguistics, the field concerns the theme and contents of text. The PCNs for Portuguese language teaching-learning have paid attention to this framework in a similar way, naming it *system of reference*, and defining that Portuguese teaching-learning in Brazil should privilege language productions destined to communication among people who do not necessarily share the same systems of reference, in other words, not visualizing the same physical or conceptual objects (BRASIL, 1998). We will see that, in fact, this framework not only defines the lexical-grammatical constitution of texts, but it relates closely to their tenor: the typical online types of communication can prescind from some contents without any loss of what is being transmitted; but the offline written type of communication can bring comprehension problems, if there is scarcity of linguistic information.

Modality

Although we can identify other language modalities besides oral and written communication, such as gestural language, we are limiting our observations to the relationships involving experiences with language that admit lexical-grammatical comparisons among each other.

In studies about metalinguistic development, modality plays a central role (GOMBERT, 1990; RAVID; TOLCHINSKY, 2002): the action of defining how we can help a person improve his/her knowledge about his/her experiences with oral and written communication is an essential point in the discussion about literacy in general, and linguistic literacy in particular. As to Portuguese teaching-learning, the discussion about the differences between oral and written communication is the groundwork for the understanding that all experiences with language vary in many ways. This difference has been established in Psycholinguistics

as a *threshold concept* (MEYER; LAND, 2006; WARD; MEYER, 2010), and it is a distinction that must be understood and assumed by the learners in order to proceed successfully in their learning processes.

In fact, some of the worse learning problems identified by Brazilian Applied Linguists are outcomes of students' incomprehension of how the differences between oral and written communication are shown by the lexical-grammatical materiality of texts. In other words, what applied linguists identify are metalinguistic problems, in the sense that we are pointing here. One of the reasons for the lack of any discussion concerning these matters is the fact that, in a traditional perspective of teaching-learning, oral communication is usually discarded as if it were the informal/colloquial register, which is something to be "eliminated" in school, and the didactic-pedagogical actions implemented after the PCNs, unfortunately, could not change this view. The result of this attitude is easily seen in students' written texts, which bring lexical-grammatical problems that place them very closely related to oral texts. In addition, these students, unable to make systematic comparisons between oral and written communication, do not become experts neither in one experience, nor in the other.

The claims we made about the frameworks for meaning construction in texts will be employed for the analysis of the text that we have chosen to discuss in this paper.

The text *Hypocritical Society*

The website known as UOL (Universo On Line in Portuguese) is a Brazilian online service provider and internet service provider that keeps a board composed by teachers who correct dissertative-argumentative texts sent to them. It is a very useful tool for the students who are preparing themselves for examinations and public selections that include text evaluation. Once a month, the teachers elaborate text proposals, and the candidates can send their texts to be assessed. The evaluation of the texts are displayed on the website one month after the submission. The great advantage of the UOL board for teachers and researchers on Portuguese teaching-learning is the fact that the materials produced and presented are not mandatory school tasks. Therefore, they can be seen as a result of the voluntary effort of the candidates in writing an argumentative-dissertative text in standard written Portuguese that deserves to be included among those that are evaluated by the board and displayed on the website UOL.

The text selected refers to the proposal presented in November 2012, which requested that students write an argumentative-dissertative text in standard Portuguese discussing the following topic: *Is it right to auction off virginity? Yes or no?* This theme was based on the news that two young adults, a Russian man

and a Brazilian woman, were auctioning off their virginity on a reality show. The proposal called for students to discuss the ethical implications of that event.

In relation to the the frameworks for meaning construction, we can say that the texts presented to the board should, in terms of *genre*, be dissertations; in terms of *register*, be formal texts; in terms of *modality*, be written texts; in terms of *tenor*, be offline interactions, with two types of interactants: a writer and a reader; and, in terms of *field*, not to assume the same systems of reference between the interactants. We will employ these pieces of information as parameters for our analysis.

Below, we present the text to be discussed in Portuguese and in English.

Sociedade Hipócrita

Não é errado leiloar a virgindade, além disto, cada um tem livre arbítrio pra fazer o que desejar e ninguém tem a ver com isso, paga quem quer e quem tem dinheiro, claro que quem não tem uma situação financeira privilegiada não vai pagar por isso, as pessoas ultimamente estão dando importância demais para a vida alheia e esquecem de cuidar das suas próprias. Elas invés de cuidar da vida de outrem porque não protestam a favor de melhores condições de vida em que vive, garanto que seria bem melhor. Se a menina fez isso foi à vontade dela quem somos pra criticá-la dizendo que o que ela fez é certo ou errado? Há principalmente aqui no Brasil milhares de coisas erradas que todos, sabem veem e ninguém protesta ou quando alguém o faz são minoria que nem é suficiente pra surtir efeito. Garanto que se as pessoas se importassem com os problemas que elas enfrentam na sociedade em que vivem como se importam com a vida dos outros, o nosso país seria muito melhor pra se viver. Porque não vejo criarem páginas pra criticar a corrupção que assola nosso país e que nos envergonha, nem pra má educação que forma pessoas incapazes de entender um texto por completo, a superlotação no transporte público que faz as pessoas desmaiarem e nem a má qualidade da nossa saúde onde pessoas morrem por esperar atendimento médico. Isso são problemas que todo mundo sabe que existe e as pessoas fazem vista grossa! Agora por causa de uma coisa tão simples dessa e normal, fazem um auê daqueles nas redes sociais, emissoras de rádio etc. Deixem a menina em paz que ela não é nem uma criminosa, muito menos cometeu delito a vida é dela tem o direito de fazer o que bem entender, aposto que se alguém oferecer o mesmo valor pra qualquer mulher sendo virgem ou não a oferta é aceita imediatamente, se com ofertas bem menores algumas mulheres já caíem diante delas imagine um valor exorbitante desses. Chega de hipocrisia e perguntem se fosse comigo eu aceitaria?.

Hypocritical Society²

There's nothing wrong with auctioning off one's virginity, besides, every one has the right to do whatever s/he wants to and nobody has anything to do with it, pays who has the money and wants to pay for it, of course, the one who does not have a privileged financial position is not going to pay for it, lately people have been giving too much importance to other people's lives and forgetting to mind their own business. Instead of taking care of other people's lives, why don't they protest for better life conditions? I believe it would be much better. If the girl did that because she wanted it to, who are we to criticize her saying that what she did was right or wrong? There are especially here in Brazil thousands of wrong things that everyone knows, sees and no one protests against them or when someone does, they are so few that it is not enough to produce any effect. I believe that if people worried about the problems they face in society where they live as they worry about other people's lives, our country would be a much better place to live. Because I don't see them neither creating pages to criticize the corruption that destroys our country and embarrasses us, nor the bad quality education that unables people to understand a text completely, neither the overcrowding in public transportation that makes people faint nor the bad quality of our health system in which people die waiting for medical assistance. These are problems that everyone knows that are out there and people overlook! Now, because of such a simple and normal thing, they make a big fuss on social networks, radio stations etc. Leave the girl alone because she is no criminal, nor has made any offense it's her own life she has the right to do whatever comes to her mind, I bet that if someone offers the same amount of money to any woman being virgin or not the offer is accepted immediately, if with lower offers some women take it imagine such an exorbitant amount like that. Enough with hypocrisy and ask if it were about me would I accept it?

We will evaluate the lexical-grammatical constitution of the text above by taking into account the five frameworks for meaning construction discussed in this paper. We will reflect upon the metalinguistic comprehension that its author reveals to have from what s/he offered to the UOL board.

In terms of *genre*, we can say that the candidate has presented a text whose characteristics remind us more an informal conversation than a dissertation.

² Our translation.

Although it is possible to argue that some aspects of the genre *dissertation* can be found in the text, given that its contents are dissertative, we still define it as a *conversation* due to the definition of genre proposed in this paper, and related to how its author has chosen to organize it, or, rather, to structure the linguistic event to address the issue proposed by the board.

We can visualize the conversational nature of the text above by observing the way the sentences are linked. The sentence combination typical to argumentative written texts should bring a thematic continuity facilitated and intersected through the progression of ideas (COSTA VAL, 1990). However, the propositions of the text above are chained in such a way that, in many of its stretches, the idea at stake is related only to the idea previously mentioned, and not to the other ones preceding it. For example, the first sentence has four propositions; the first three share a fragile thematic bond while the last one has no relationship at all with the others:

“It is not wrong to auction off the virginity.”

“Everyone has free will to do whatever he wants and nobody has nothing to do with that, whoever has money and wants to pay, pay it.”

“The one who does not have a privileged financial condition is not going to pay for it.”

“Lately people are giving more importance to other people’s lives and forget minding their own lives.”

It is possible to infer that, while constructing her/his text, the candidate wrote what came to her/his mind, writing down ideas that were mostly connected to the last ones s/he had just written down; they were not connected to the text as a whole, as is expected in written dissertations. As a result, with respect to the combining clauses, her/his text, instead of showing a backbone, can be compared to a chain, in which each link is connected only to the one immediately following it.

In terms of *register*, we can acknowledge the candidate’s endeavour to bring the lexicon of the text close to the standard Portuguese, but there are some lexical characteristics related to the genre conversation that structures the text. There are some formal standard words such as the verb Port. *haver* meaning *exist* (*there are*) and the words Port. *outrem* (*others*), *delito* (*misdoing*) and *surtir* (*produce*); the cliché expression Port. *corrupção que assola nosso país* (*the corruption that destroys our country*) together with colloquial uses such as the hyperbole *thousands of wrong things*, Port. *fazer vista grossa* (*people overlook*) and *auê* (*make a fuss*), and the generic Port. *coisas* (*things*).

As to the register, these linguistic forms bring to the text a hybrid character, and the candidate’s effort not to sound informal reveals that s/he has gotten some

information when it comes to colloquial speech in her/his Portuguese classes, and s/he is concerned about register. Thus, her/his text reflects the preoccupation of Portuguese curricular projects in keeping the students informed about the issues concerning linguistic variation, especially with regard to formality/informality of language.

In terms of *field*, the characteristics of the genre *conversation* that define the text mentioned are very apparent, in at least one important grammatical aspect: the referential mechanisms. Take, for example, the use of the word *girl* (Port. *menina*), more than once, without any reference to whom this girl is, since the explanation concerning this girl in the text proposal is not enough for the author to dispense with. The polysemous word *page* (Port. *páginas*) without any specification, although not detrimental to the text like the word *girl*, is an evidence that its author counts on sharing systems of reference with her/his reader. This attitude is acceptable only in online and in presence interactions, in which interactants can solve misunderstanding problems that in written and offline communication would not be possible to do. The assumption of sharing systems of reference characterizes the text in terms of field, and this feature, together with the other frameworks already quoted above, keeps the text apart from the proposal of being a dissertation of the type expected by UOL.

At this point of our evaluation, given that what we can see in terms of the *tenor* of the text that it is interrelated to its field and its genre, it is possible to perceive the close relationship among the frameworks for meaning construction. Since the author has produced a text as if it were a conversation, assuming common systems of reference to her/his reader, s/he reveals that s/he has built a textual structural and content organization from the conceptualization of an *interlocutor*, not a *reader*, although it should have been the opposite, as expected from a dissertative written text.

It is not for other reason that, in some points of the text, s/he turns to her/his interlocutor, challenging her/him or requesting a change of attitude by the use of the injunctive *leave the girl alone*, and the suggestion *ask if it were about me would I accept that?*

More specifically, the author shows that s/he conceptualizes an interlocutor with whom s/he interacts in an online and real time context, since s/he does not mention some important information to clarify the meanings of the text. Instead, the writer presupposes that whoever is reading the text shares the same system of references related to the fact discussed, and that his/her reader may access that information without any difficulty. However, obviously, this presuppositions are not compatible with the genre required by the proposal; therefore, for the author to be minimally understood, his/her reader must accept the interactional condition established by her/him when s/he wrote the text – this is something

that may or may not occur, though. If the author is pleading to be accepted in a university or public position, this is a risk too great to be taken.

In relation to the features of the text concerning modality, we can also associate this framework to the others and build an important hypothesis about the problems of construction in written texts: together, they can direct the text to oral communication – the specific type of oral communication already known by students when they enter the school system in Brazil: an online colloquial, conversational oral communication. However, at the end of their school years, unfortunately, they do not seem to have broadened their knowledge about written texts. We believe that this problem persists because, among others, there is no didactic and systematic work to help learners develop some metalinguistic comprehension of some basic differences between oral and written communication, let alone the internal differences in oral experience, on one hand, and in written experience, on the other. Not by chance, some researchers establish that modality, or, in other words, the written or the oral nature of a text, is the central parameter, through which the other dimensions are adjusted (BERMAN; RAVID, 2009).

This type of reasoning is reinforced by the fact that the most important structural problems found in Brazilian students' written texts are exactly those related to the lexical-grammatical characteristics that approximate their texts to the oral ones they are used to producing in their everyday lives. The teaching-learning of Portuguese currently practiced in Brazil is based on taxonomies and categorizations, which does not allow students to reflect about these issues. In fact, a proper metalinguistic discussion according to the perspective we are dealing with in this article has not been employed in schools either.

In the next section, we will analyse students' remarks concerning the text above and relate them to the analysis already employed.

Students' metalinguistic comments on the text *Hypocritical Society*

Methodology

The text chosen to be analysed in this paper was presented to 80 High School students of two private and two public schools in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Our aim was to discuss their metalinguistic perception about the text they had read. After reading the text, students' should have answered the following question: "If you were a Portuguese teacher, what kinds of comments would you make in relation to that text?". There was a supposition that students would consider themselves in the place of their teachers since they are responsible for framing all reflections and thoughts about language in classrooms through questions intended to motivate students to focus on every metalinguistic statement present in the text.

Our interpretation of their answers will be done according to the following perspectives:

- 1) The frameworks for meaning construction;
- 2) Their metalinguistic capacities, which are pre-requisites for the identification of these frameworks.

Analysis

- 1) In terms of the frameworks for meaning construction:
We can detect, in a quantitative manner:
 - a) *Register*: framework related to a quite large enough quantity of answers – 20 students made comments of this type. The terms “colloquial” and “slang” appeared in 17 answers. This can be an evidence of the focus on linguistic variation in Portuguese teaching lessons; besides, some of the comments reproduced below take into account the type of vocabulary used in the text:

“Excessive employment of slang.”

“Employment of non-standard words.”

“Excessive colloquial language.”

“Ocasionalmente, he used slang.”

“Some slang is unacceptable.”

“There are many punctuation errors and some slang, such as “auê” (Eng. “fuss”) and “pra” (Eng. “for”), words which are not allowed in the standard norm.”

“Slang, inappropriate to be employed at ENEM, a University entrance exam that requires formal language.”

“He used inadequate characteristics, slang.”

“I would consider it an informal text, and I would indicate some words such as “pra”, which is without questioning the informal variation of “para” (Eng. “for”).”

“We have Portuguese mistakes and some kinds of slang.”

“There are many grammatical mistakes, such as wrong words.”

On the other hand, the number of comments on the register can also reveal students’ tendency to observe and conceptualize the text in relation to the lexical level regardless of its structural argumentation and clause combination. Thus, observing slang and colloquial uses of language, phenomena quite evident at the lexical level, will be very easy and accessible to students, since reflecting on words is not hard for them. Yet, they were not able to reach higher levels of

analysis as argument structure and clause combination. This idea is reinforced since no one mentions the use of colloquial language structure in other levels of linguistic structure beyond the lexicon, for example, in the sentences “nobody has nothing to do with that” and “people overlook”.

b) *Genre*: only one mention:

“Comments would depend. Is it a text to be disclosed in what kind of media? And by whom? That would make some difference, because even though it is easy to understand, there are indeed some considerations, but, for example, if it is a text with the opinion of a common citizen on Facebook, the text could be more acceptable (or partially). But, for a serious newspaper, it should have been produced more carefully.”

This single mention is a fact that receives our attention because it is very strange that students make silence in relation to genre, since the national curricular project of Portuguese teaching-language in which text genres are the focus of classroom teaching has been proposed for many years now, despite the conceptual perspective ascribed to them.

c) *Modality*: likewise, there was only one comment pointing to the inadequate structure of the text:

“The text has only one paragraph, besides some punctuation mistakes, and possibly addresses something that would be spoken.”

d) *Tenor and field*: there were no comments related to these frameworks, which means that students were used to the type of interaction proposed by the author, and for that reason they accessed the system of references employed by the text. From this point of view, we can say that they were engaged not as text readers, but as its interlocutors, having in mind the ideas conveyed in the text while agreeing, disagreeing, and criticizing. They argued whether its opinions were ethically pertinent, excessively critical or not. Among 80 students, 44 fit this profile. As they positioned themselves as interlocutors, they acknowledged the author’s interactional proposal without noticing that, as a written matter, the text did not present the necessary basic information to become satisfactorily readable: they even conceptualized the image of the “girl” that the author did not present properly. Concerning this issue, many teachers describe the students’s astonishment when they are asked about missing information in their written texts: “But you already knew that...so, I did not have to write that down...”

2) In terms of metalinguistic capacities in general

Most of the students' comments referred back to the descriptive principles held dear by traditional Portuguese teaching-learning. They are form errors such as punctuation, orthography etc. Interestingly, 14 students mentioned that punctuation, orthography and agreement problems in the text caused its coherence problems. Their action can reveal their attempt to connect the contents they have been studying in school, which is an intelligent action that teaching-learning didactics should acknowledge and take into careful consideration:

"The ideas presented are a little confusing, maybe for the lack of commas and adequate punctuation."

"The text has punctuation errors that make it incoherent."

"The girl who wrote it runs away from the theme and shows a certain confusion at employing words, maybe because of punctuation errors."

"The lack of punctuation makes the text complicated and hard to be read and understood."

"It is necessary some punctuation to grant some coherence to the sentences."

The students who observed semantic problems in the text described them as superficial errors. They might have detected other mistakes, but, because of the lack of conceptual resources and apparatus that should have been provided in their schooling, they could not verbalize their impressions. From this supposition we can state that the students might have had some difficulty while reading the text, and handled it with the precarious tools their schools offer them. Despite the effort in offering a better quality Portuguese teaching-learning than the one that students received before the PCNs, these resources still constitute its conceptual basis and influence their traditional comments, without any mention to text genres.

We have previously seen that 44 students have positioned themselves as interlocutors of the text *Hypocritical Society*, and not as its readers, by discussing the author's ideas and interacting with its contents, instead of evaluating its linguistic aspects. In other words: instead of focusing on its metalinguistic dimension, which would have been an attitude proper of a language teacher, students observed it as an object-language, that is, in its transparency, taking for granted both the linguistic forms employed in the construction of its meanings, and the way its contents fit the textual genre required in the proposal. Thus, they did not grant the text the necessary opacity for a metalinguistic observation, which is the specific cognitive action for a text analysis.

Most students have shown not to know how to behave cognitively before a text, which requires them to relate its lexico-grammatical aspects to its intended enunciative insertion. When it comes to knowing the language, students do not know how to metalinguistically analyse the text they are observing. This recognition involves the aspects discussed by Rodrigues (2005) and quoted throughout this paper, and is part of what should be taught in school, so that students develop autonomy while reading or writing texts produced and interpreted in and out of school. Without learning and mastering this skill, they will not be able to identify the frameworks for meaning construction, neither when discussing them, nor when reading or writing them.

In sum, concerning the students' metalinguistic knowledge, we point out that the frameworks for meaning construction that the students were able to detect in the text *Hypocritical Society* are mostly related to register. This can be justified by the ability they employed while observing the linguistic materiality of the text, that is, they were limited to analysing the words.

Final remarks

These final remarks begin with two important claims: the first one is concerned with our proposal of frameworks for meaning construction as we do not intend to cover all the possibilities of metalinguistic action. Our concern is with only those regarded as close as possible to the lexical-grammatical language organization. For example, a framework for meaning construction more properly related to the concept of multiliteracies (ROJO, 2012) refers to the media in which the texts are presented. In the discussions about metalinguistic development, the perceptions of the different modes of reading that come from the new communication media is an important matter. Therefore, their cognitive implications can and must be object of study, but the comparison among them does not include the grammatical organization of texts; for this reason, the *medium* aspect was not considered in this paper.

The second important claim is that we do not intend to identify or describe any framework that takes into account all types of genres. Although every mode of language, in terms of its grammatical constitution, can be inserted in the frameworks proposed in this paper, the plurality and open-ended nature of textual genres makes it impossible to consider a unique framework that can fit all of them. Moreover, each framework involves textual characteristics in a continuous manner, and new aspects can be added when new discursive possibilities emerge. For example, when it comes to tenor, a framework associated to the relationships that people involved in a communicative event establish from the online and real time situation to the absolutely offline and desynchronized one, there is a myriad

of interactional conditions that will influence the linguistic constitution of texts, due to the creation of new communication media and technologies.

For these and many other reasons, the conceptual proposal we have presented is open to new and more refined possibilities of metalinguistic reflections and debates. Obviously, the textual analysis based only in the frameworks for meaning construction is not enough for a good-quality language teaching-learning environment. However, this approach can be useful to draw students' attention to the fact that dealing with the linguistic production of a text is more than just worrying about its lexical-grammatical aspects. Besides, the proposal of the link between linguistic materiality and enunciative dimension can contribute to give sense to those countless descriptions, mostly the syntactic ones, which students have to deal with during their school years. As a result, these actions can lead us to fulfill the PCNs' requirement that the mother tongue teaching-learning should involve the comprehension and production of texts representative of social practices. What this paper shows is the imperious need that these actions be followed by a metalinguistic awareness not only connected to the frameworks for meaning construction, but also connected observing everyday uses of language.

All in all, we do expect that our proposal has accomplished the task of showing that any discussion about language teaching-learning must undertake language as an experience. Didactic actions coherent with this attitude must include, regardless many other accomplishments, comparisons among different genres, registers, tenor, fields and modalities, in order to promote metalinguistic development. Furthermore, one must abolish grammar studies based solely on taxonomies and activities that do not focus on metalinguistic development, because such tasks do not allow students to see texts as lexical-grammatical accomplishments of discursive properties. The students' comments analysed in this paper could have been much wider, more systematic, and more refined if they had had the opportunity to understand how, beyond the analysis of grammatical data in a text, it could be evaluated as a discursive fact.

Several authors have been legitimating metalinguistic development and metalinguistic knowledge as constitutive of literacy in mother tongue and foreign language, as it provides a strong metalinguistic attitude towards all types of linguistic actions (BIALYSTOK, 1986; FRANCIS, 1999; RAVID; TOLCHINSKY, 2002; HOMER, 2009; BERMAN; RAVID, 2009). The issue that this premise entails is that metalinguistic perceptions cannot be left out of the language teaching-learning curricular projects. It is mandatory to develop a methodological work and a content organization intended for the metalinguistic comprehension of the conditions of text production of different genres. It should also include several investigations dedicated to motivate learners to think about the linguistic mechanisms crossed by the many and multiple possibilities of using language: different modalities,

genres, registers, tenors and fields, observing, in a reversed movement, how these mechanisms make evident the frameworks presented in this paper.

In their everyday life, people engage in metalinguistic actions of many sorts: they plan, select, compare, correct and improve what they want to say. However, only the systematized and oriented practices with language, those of the kind that must be implemented in the school, will allow learners to build generalizations about language construction in a metalinguistic level. This is a necessary capacity for their autonomy as language users, in many semiotic dimensions. For this purpose, the initiative of promoting metalinguistic reflection as a constitutive feature of language teaching-learning is a very important step to help students overcome the limitations of their knowledge about their uses of language. As we have seen in this paper, these students' knowledge does not go beyond its formal and superficial aspects, features and phenomena, which are information legitimated in the traditional school. It is a very serious conclusion to realize that fifteen years of PCNs have not produced any difference in their learning practices.

It is fundamental and indispensable for students to take the text as the axis of observation and of language study, and from this axis they are able to recognize further levels of analysis. It is also fundamental for them to proceed to the interconnection of the two language facets as a discursive phenomenon. Otherwise, as we have considered in this paper, the best that we will have in schools is what we have already detected now: students without any comprehension of what constitutes the act of reading a text, and with a structural perception limited to its lexicon and to its linear and superficial configuration. In other words, they neither observe the text in its discursive facet, reflecting on its metalinguistic aspects, nor produce high quality written texts.

The focus on the development of metalinguistic knowledge in school should be part of didactic projects to help people consciously make their linguistic decisions when they speak and write, having in mind what they want to communicate and with whom; what level of (in)formality they should use, and with what purpose. These capacities will make them better and more mature users of language in the countless frameworks of meaning construction in their linguistic action.

GERHARDT, A. F. L. M. O conhecimento metalinguístico, os enquadramentos da construção dos significados nos textos e o ensino de língua portuguesa. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v.59, n.2, p.225-248, 2015.

- *RESUMO: Propõe-se o conceito de enquadramentos da construção dos significados nos textos, referentes às dimensões das experiências comunicativas das pessoas, manifestadas na estrutura léxico-gramatical dos textos: gênero, registro, teor, campo e modalidade. Observam-se esses enquadramentos na análise de uma redação dissertativo-argumentativa que não corresponde a nenhuma das expectativas esperadas para a natureza do material solicitado*

pela proposta de escritura. O mesmo texto é apresentado a 80 alunos do Ensino Médio, e a observação dos seus comentários revela a qualidade dos seus conhecimentos metalinguísticos: a compreensão dos níveis de análise linguística limitada à palavra; a percepção do registro, mas não dos outros enquadramentos; a limitação aos aspectos lineares-superficiais e rudimentares do texto: ortografia, pontuação etc., e a visão do texto na sua dimensão língua-objeto, e não metalinguagem. A análise suscita observações acerca das condições atuais do ensino de língua materna no Brasil em termos dos saberes escolares que os alunos têm construído sobre a linguagem.

- PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gêneros discursivos e textuais. Desenvolvimento metalinguístico. Ensino de língua. Produção textual.

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