Strips in elementary school: Multimodality contributing to the construction of meaning

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ABSTRACT

The text presented here is related to a larger research project that is being developed in the Graduate Program in Letters (PPGLETRAS), of a Public University involving elementary education and aspects related to multimodality and reading. We made an excerpt from the project for this study with the aim of presenting the strips as a textual genre marked by multimodality dialoguing for the construction of meanings. As theoretical assumptions, we resort to the studies of Vergueiro (2004), Rama (2016), Dionísio and Vasconcelos (2013), Rojo (2012), Menezes De Sousa (2007), among others. As a methodology, theoretical studies were used on the conceptions of reading and production of multimodal texts in the classroom, whose texts (strips) consisted of the corpus of analysis. The results of the study dealt with the relevance of the comic strip genre and the importance of multimodality for understanding meaning.

Keywords: Comics, Multimodality, Construction of meaning, Elementary education.

INTRODUCTION

The study group that we are now participating in is linked to a research project under the title *(Multi) Literacies and the Textual and/or Discursive Genres: Contributions to the Teaching and Learning of Languages in Times.* It is a group that has been building fruitful discussions about teaching and language in its different modalities, and has the participation of researchers and students enrolled in graduate programs at their different levels.

Thus, among the readings carried out, we highlight the research of Vergueiro (2004), Rama (2016), Dionísio and Vasconcelos (2013), Rojo (2012), Rojo and Barbosa (2015), Menezes De Sousa (2007), which address the presence of multimodality in the configuration of textual genres, as well as the importance of developing dynamic practices for the analysis and production of texts. Studies on the theme of reading comic strips, such as that of Sousa et al. (2015), present a teaching proposal with the reading of comics, bringing the potential of visual literacy to develop language and reading skills in elementary school.

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The intense visual and linguistic invitation of the Strips and Comics has snatched subjects to materialize this genre as an important reading material for the teaching and learning of the construction of meaning. They use different supports, different contexts and are widely used in the virtual environment. Acknowledging, because the esteem of the studies of multimodal textual genres, we made a cut for the study with the purpose of presenting the Comics (Comics), strips as a textual genre marked by multimodality dialoguing for the construction of meanings.

Regarding the methodology of the cut, we outlined the study from the theoretical studies carried out on the conceptions of reading and production of multimodal texts, and as a corpus of analysis we resorted to a sample of texts (comics/strips), a database produced by students in elementary school.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS - MULTIMODAL TEXT AND COMICS

In the panorama in which technologies present challenges, we point out new demands that involve new literacies, including the digital, and with that in the face of semiosis, and this sign that until then had not been understood, can be decoded and another conception can be put into effect. At this point, the role of reading is highlighted as a process of construction of new meanings as a practice on the ways of being of language to understand why to read, and to understand what the other wanted to say (GERALDI, 1997).

In a context of social and technological changes, it forces us to agree with what Dionísio (2011) explains about the importance of reviewing and expanding concepts related to reading and interactions when it comes to textual studies. The meaning of a text can only be understood by the articulations that exist in the text "graphic arrangement of the text on paper or on the computer screen" (Dionísio, 2011, p. 141). This revisitation recommends including multiliteracies, to produce meanings, arguing that literacy is not the one that knows how to read, but the one capable of giving meanings to multiple forms of language, such as imagery and verbal, that is, a plural reader.

In the same line of reasoning, Rojo and Moura (2019, p. 14), argue that in order to be literate, it is necessary to go beyond the limits of coding and decoding codes, since the presence of numerous digital devices opens space for different cultures, which implies a multiplicity of literacies, which become multiliteracies. It was the very influence of these contemporary innovations that intensified the "literacies in multiple languages (static and moving images, music, dance and gesture, oral and written verbal language, etc.)" (Rojo; Moura, 2019, p. 20).

The multimodality present in the different spaces requires teaching proposals that imply culturally redesigned textual productions. Scholars have dedicated themselves to research that addresses this theme, such as: Dionísio and Vasconcellos (2013), Rojo and Barbosa (2015), who approach studies that deal with multimodality, the materialization of texts with multiple languages. It can be exemplified with the studies of Rojo and Barbosa (2015) who bring as a contribution to teaching the concern of changes in society with

the advancement of information and communication technologies and the new way of reading. An approach of this nature implies rethinking teaching practices and bringing to the daily life of the classroom the issues of multimodality and its role in communicative situations.

Digital spaces, for example, as a communicative environment, have used different languages in the composition of texts, which implies knowledge of methodological and theoretical knowledge that underlies the proposal. (Dionísio, 2011, p, 138) very well explains this relationship between languages "[...] All the resources used in the construction of textual genres exert a rhetorical function in the construction of meanings of the texts. The combination of visual material with writing is increasingly observed [...]", because human coexistence is increasingly inserted in an increasingly visual society and visual elements become increasingly evident.

When we think about multimodal texts, we have to be attentive to go beyond verbal language, since the look of multimodality requires us to look both at writing and at aspects related to visual grammar, design and redesign, in addition to the valuation of the social semiotics of hybrid texts in which we find multiple views of those who read them.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), when raising the perspective that visual structures can be associated with linguistic structures, and that both can indicate different points of view, proposes a negotiation through their agencies the construction of meanings (meaning making) about a totally fragmented reality. He explains:

> *Meanings belong to culture, rather than to specific semiotic modes. […]. For instance, what is expressed in language through the choice between different word classes and clause structures, may, in visual communication, be expressed through the choice between different uses of colour or different compositional structures. And this will affect meaning. Expressing something verbally or visually makes a difference.[1] (Kress, G. Van Leeuwen, 2001).*

The literature explains that the concept of multimodality was introduced by Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996), a scholar in the epistemological field of Social Semiotics, who understands that this epistemology has a wider scope to understand and account for all the modes of representation contained in the text, whether visual or imagetic. "Visual structures realize meanings as linguistic structures do also and thereby point to different interpretations of experience and different forms of social interaction" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.2).[3]

The scholars Dionisio and Vasconcelos (2013, p. 21), associate multimodality with combinations of resources and considers the multimodal to be the fact of associating music, images, images, drawings, gestures, movements, facial expressions with writing, because "when we speak or write a text, we are

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[3] Visual structures realize meanings just like linguistic structures and, therefore, point to different interpretations of experience and different forms of social interaction" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.2).

using at least two modes of representation: words and gestures, words and intonations, words and images [...]" (Dionisio, 2011, p. 139).

Based on this conception, Dionisio (2011, p. 142) states that "one can speak of the existence of a visual informative continuum of written textual genres that goes from the least visually informative to the most visually informative". If we think about it another way, we can say that there are texts that, depending on the layout, or the way they are distributed on paper, or on a computer screen, already provide clues about which textual genre is being constructed. Comics and comic strips are examples of a more visually informative multimodal genre.

According to Ramos (2016, p. 20-21), comics are "a great label, a hypergenre, which would aggregate different other genres, each with its own peculiarities". In this way, the comic strip, cartoon and cartoon genres, as they share the same language to compose their narratives, are "sheltered within this large umbrella called comics".

Multimodality and the construction of meanings in comics refer to the different ways of representing aspects related by linguistics in the construction of texts. Advances in technological resources have brought to contemporaneity tools for film montages, text production, lighting, figurativeness, which now constitute multimodal brands present in different spaces. Rojo (2009) ponders in his studies on the need to consider multisemiotic literacy, since contemporary society and texts are increasingly multimodal and it is in them that we find the modalities of verbal (oral and written) and non-verbal language in a contiguous set of signs/languages.

In this sense, we understand that multimodality joins the compositions of writing, speech and image to construct meanings. It is from this perspective that we pay attention to the issues of reading and understanding texts that are part of the daily life of the subjects. Comics and strips are texts of everyday actions and social events loaded with multiple information and require the reader to have skills for issues of multisemiotic and multimodal genres. Regarding this discussion, Dionísio (2008) asserts that:

> Image and word maintain an increasingly closer, increasingly integrated relationship. [...] All the resources used in the construction of textual genres exert a rhetorical function in the construction of meanings of texts. [...] Representation and images are not merely forms of expression for the dissemination of information [...], but are, above all, specially constructed texts that reveal our relationships with society and with what society represents (Dionísio, 2008, p. 132).

In this perspective of Dionísio (2008) we infer that among the multimodal texts, we include the diversity of genres such as: cartoons, strips, comics, comic books, paintings, images, illustrations, magazine covers, videos, cinema, etc., especially comics, which materialize in social contexts.

Both strips and comics can be understood as textual genres, as both involve a social communicative process, and fulfill the purpose of exposing ideas and criticisms with different themes, current or timeless.

Ramos (2007, p. 101), scholars of this theme, asserts that "comics (or just comics) is the label that wins most of the stories made with the language in comics", however, other denominations appear in literature depending on their connection: book or *fanzine,* independent magazine or sheets of paper.

METHODOLOGICAL AND ANALYTICAL ASPECTS

We started the methodological paths through documentary studies of scholars who deal with the theme of multimodality and comic books. Next, we selected a comic from a larger organized corpus of a database. Among the genres and themes, a diversity of multimodal texts were found, such as: Bombril advertising, cleaning products, car advertisements, fruit and vegetable advertising, natural juice advertising, imported perfumes, natura advertising, movie advertisements, comic strips, comics, comic books, among other genres.

From this list of textual genres we selected a strip. The strip under discussion can be found in the book Vontade de saber: Portuguese, for the ninth grade (Alves; Brugnerotto, 2012, p. 65). And for analysis, we adopt the following parameters: *observe multimodal resources* including framing, colors, contexts. *Critical reading* based on interpretations of the context and situationality of the text. And *grammatical exploration* based on the analysis of grammatical referents.

Figure 1: Comic strip analysis

Source: Cedraz (2009, p. 65).

The selected strip belongs to Turma do Xaxado, by Antônio Cedraz and information about the characters can be found on the author's website. They are: *Xaxado* (grandson of a cangaceiro from Lampião's gang). *Zé Pequeno* (reputation for being lazy), *Arturzinho* (selfish, miserly, vain, self-interested). *Marinês and Capiba* (brothers with different dreams. Marinês respects and cares for nature and Capiba wants to be a singer similar to Luiz Gonzaga). This class presents aspects of a pedagogical-

educational character through the language of comic books, and has been an instrument in the art of teaching children.

Cedraz's comics[4] present a diversity of themes such as portraying life in the countryside, legends and mysteries of Brazilian culture, folklore and Brazilianness and are present in different works of textbooks, highlighting the author Antonio Cedraz as a Comic Book and Caricaturists. He is awarded the HQ MIX Trophy for Best Children's Comics in Brazil (2002).

Starting the analysis with the *critical reading* of the strip, it is necessary to activate the reading of the world, one of the reading strategies (Sole, 1998), where the reader makes predictions, questions the events present in society and raises hypotheses. Thus, it is possible to anticipate meanings "why hang your socks on the windows? When is there a custom of placing objects in the windows? These are already indications for a critical reading of the strip. It makes it necessary to interpret the strip information related to the hanging stockings and make relationships with the Christmas season and a piece of clothing hung at night to win gifts. An argument that requires prior knowledge and an exploration of the customs of the time.

We restrict ourselves to giving greater emphasis to multimodal resources and the construction of meanings, the objective of the study. The strip under analysis begins with a sequence of images which allows the organization of the narrative and for this we resort to the iconic aspects. And as an iconic element we have the design represented by the frames of the sequences, and the insertion of symbologies in the first comics (waiting for Santa Claus, looking out the window) and in the third comic presents a new plane (facial expressions of both the son and the mother, through the eyebrows of both).

See that the construction of meaning, which indicates the dissatisfaction of the characters, is indicated by the multimodality, the mannerisms of the face, the design of the mouths, the colors, the lighting that provides inferences and assumptions. We call attention to the relationship between the multimodality present in the strip for the construction of meaning and the presence of the sewing machine in the background, the size of the sock, the colors, the context of the strip are visible multimodal aspects that contribute to the interpretation of the strip.

Images have altered the scenarios that were previously occupied by verbal language and have thus encouraged studies to investigate the various semiotic modes in communication. The work with comics and strips deserves a more attentive approach than other textual genres, emphasizing, above all, the multimodal aspects and the role of the teacher in the classroom. Vergueiro (2004, p. 26), is in favor of this textual genre, because he understands that there are no limits to working with comics, and in the case

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[4] On ILHA DE LIVROS, Official Store of the Xaxado Gang, you can find the books www.ilhadelivros.com.br the Xaxado Gang website www.xaxado.com.br. Author's contact cedraz@xaxado.com.br

of strips "the only limit to their good use in any classroom is the creativity of the teacher and his ability to use them well"

And finally, the *grammatical exploration* that falls on the dialogue present in informal communication situations, and the very common irony in comic strips. Other points can be considered in the interpretation of the strips that deal with the aspects of extrapolation of reality, such as, for example, today they still put socks and shoes in the window to get a Christmas present? Aspects not explored in this text given its purpose of study.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The cut of the presentation was the strips, a way to show the presence of different genres in teaching, involving multimodality. It was possible to undertake that the strips have gained prominence in the Enem (National High School Exam), becoming a recurring resource in tests, textbooks and PNBE (National School Library Program).

Technological advances have brought the imagetic element to textual and communication constructions and a new challenge for the area of textual linguistics. Thus, multimodality arrives to respond to this other mode and give meaning to the text. The studies of Ramos (2009, 2011) have been a reference about this textual genre as a multimodal and humorous genre. According to the scholar, it is very common to encompass within the hypergenre the so-called comics the cartoons, the cartoons, the comic strips as ways of producing comics.

Ramos (2011) adds that several genres use the language of comics, some closer to short stories or graphic poems, others that predominate the narrative sequence, in one or more frames, and the use of graphic language of comics, such as the balloon, multimodality.

The study now carried out with the aim of presenting the strips as a textual genre marked by multimodality dialoguing for the construction of meanings, brought important contributions to continue with the research we are developing in public schools.

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