

Literacy and the process of linguistic literacy: Teaching based on linguistic assumptions



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Milena Beatriz Vicente Valentim

Master's student in Language Studies at the Graduate Program in Language Studies PPGEL – UFCAT. Scholarship holder of CAPES.

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ABSTRACT

The school is characterized by an environment in which the use of language will naturally occur in situations of social interaction. However, this same language is constantly being evaluated, in oral and mainly written forms. The process of adaptation to the school environment does not occur

instantaneously with the entry into the classroom, because the child is not a "tabula rasa", on the contrary, he is already endowed with an internalized grammar, that is, a "language" learned in the family environment in which he is inserted. Thus, this study aims to relate to each phase of acquisition of the oral and written modality based on the contribution of Linguistics – as a science that studies language – at each stage, to what it refers to as essential in the teaching process during literacy and literacy, as well as the mechanisms of reading production as the deciphering and graphic and functional comprehension of the language.

Keywords: Literacy, Learning processes, Contributions of Linguistics.

1 INTRODUCTION

Every child is capable of learning to speak and write, thus building a means of communication whose focus is their own social integration. This child learns the language by living with other speakers, otherwise he would not learn any human linguistic sign (SAUSSURE, 2012; LABOV, 2008). Such coexistence enables the individual, in training, to learn the language and its structure based on the linguistic creativity allowed by the system itself in vogue (CHOMSKY, 1978). This process does not depend on theoretical knowledge of the language, that is, even if the child cannot explain the functioning of the language used, each sentence enunciated and, later, written will be within the conventions predetermined by the language. This is confirmed in the principles of Chomsky's generativisms.

Therefore, the process of linguistic acquisition is complex, since the graphic system of each word does not always correspond to the phonic system. The former, being a conventional phenomenon, does not always correspond exactly to the phonic system. Perhaps because we do not understand this difference, many of us run the risk of always striving for "right/wrong", despising the natural phenomena that occur from the acquisition of language.

Thus, an isolated word, with all its archphonemes, only exists because it has been reduced to a smaller dimension (CAGLIARI, 2010).



In larger dimensions – text – the code written through these archphonemes appears as a mystery to the child. Therefore, the child first acquires the oral modality and then makes the process of moving to the written modality. The inversion of this process generates complex internal conflicts that, in many cases, result in contempt for the school. The attempt to relate sound to grapheme is one of the main factors of embarrassment for both the student and the teacher. This is because differentiating the sound from the spelling is, in many cases, a challenge.

In view of this, we intend to understand the process of moving from oral to written in order to achieve literacy. Based on this, we realize that the school environment functions as a place of exclusion of the natural knowledge of the language, as well as analyzing whether this child knows how to communicate – read and write – as the school imposes on him. In this sense, the school often serves to introduce a language that is distant from the reality of the student whose context resembles the artificial one. The student is the target of quantitative evaluation, consisting of linguistic parameters that often do not emit any practical and usual meaning, contributing to the inhibition of this student as a speaking subject, "our caterpillar in metamorphosis". This practice casts doubt on the conceptions of this child as a speaking subject in formation and in relation to the previous knowledge of the language acquired by him.

How language represents the culture of a people or speaking community (HALL, 2011; CUCHE, 1999), it is natural for the child to develop linguistically based on the sociocultural and linguistic characteristics of the community to which he belongs. Thus, this discussion focuses on the processes of the transition from oral to written modality during the literacy process, taking into account the contributions of Linguistics so that the classroom environment becomes conducive to the learning of the various modalities of language (speech and writing), considering, mainly, the concrete situations in which the interaction is effective.

This study is based on explanatory methodology. According to Gil (2008), this method consists of identifying and describing the characteristics of the systematically observed phenomenon, as well as its contribution to their occurrence. The results discussed in this chapter are the result of the observation of the 1st year of Elementary School in a private school in the city of Catalão-GO.

2 THE LINGUISTIC "METAMORPHOSIS" THAT INVOLVES LEARNING TO WRITE

In the context of the classroom, specifically in a literacy class, it was possible to find a vast and fertile ground of social, cultural and linguistic values. Every child who enters the school believes that he or she knows his or her own language and therefore does not understand what it means to "speak wrongly" or "write wrongly".

The adaptation of the children to the school environment occurs gradually, as they trace a path of adaptation and learning. Written language is a complex process, since it does not occur as easily as



speech acquisition. As a result, several problems and conflicts are faced by students in literacy, which are almost always caused by the teachers' lack of understanding and non-acceptance of the students' linguistic reality.

During the classroom observations, we considered the propositions raised by the guiding work of this study, Literacy and Linguistics, considering the practices adopted by the teachers responsible for the observed class. It is important to say that the process of language acquisition in the written modality induces students, with the vast majority of 6 years old, to write "wrong" because they do not understand the correspondence between archphoneme and phoneme. In this way, we defend the importance of bringing to the classroom knowledge such as: linguistic variation, linguistic prejudice, etc., even in the context of literacy. What is often done is the highlighting to the happy me is wrong, or we don't exist, for example.

Adaptation to writing takes place in stages and, therefore, can be easily related to caterpillars. It feeds on many leaves and then wraps itself in a cocoon, going into a long hibernation.

Such a process focuses on your re-emergence as a beautiful, renewed butterfly. Thus, the infant babbles to then form small sentences and then learn the graphic symbol that represents each syllabic encounter that is present in the act of speech. For the first phases, we understand the need to pay attention to reading exercises, by listening to the reading done by the teacher, in order to know the sound corresponding to each word.

The different variations are also noticeable in the writing. However, correcting supposed "spelling mistakes" also needs to be done with major caveats. Wrong in what sense? What does it mean for a child to write *jakare* or *glo* instead of alligator or ice? Unfortunately, it was possible to notice that there is still the indiscriminate use of the red pen by some educators, a fact that caught our attention due to the reaction of the children to the red accents in the tasks.

Such an assumption does not mean that the writing is "totally wrong" or "totally right." But it is closer to what is considered "standard". Therefore, the teacher must adopt an encouraging posture towards the children. Encouraging them to clear their doubts, reflecting on "how I believe a word is spelled" to arrive at "how this word is actually spelled". This type of language intervention teaches the child to reflect as well as come to their own conclusions. This is a more efficient attitude than simply launching an answer without it making logical sense to the child.

In the literacy classroom environment, we also noticed the large number of activities done by the students. Such activities are carried out by reading undertaken on their own initiative, that is, by the students themselves. Because of this, a certain anxiety is generated in educators, which has sometimes hindered the enjoyment of the educational activity and, subsequently, its success.



On the other hand, the teacher cannot focus too much on activities that simply do not convey the basics necessary for the age group of his class. It is important for the teacher to use information that helps children to read. Writing is a result of the act of reading, or knowing the graphic system.

We infer that whoever is able to read, is able to write, and the reverse we know is not possible. We have discovered that a child knows how to be a copyist and at the same time does not know how to read.

During the process of learning to read, the teacher needs to have adequate tools – in addition to knowledge – to facilitate children's reading. For the most part, teachers have become accustomed to the fact that they read automatically and do not focus on the mechanisms of knowledge that the child needs to decipher written language in oral. It would be very interesting to think "what knowledge does it take to write the word home?"

And it is precisely this knowledge that will be necessary in the literacy process. It is not enough to "throw" letters at children, or to say that B has the sound of [b], because it can still be confused and interpreted as [p]. Another example is the child who says "*falao*" instead of "*falaram*" and needs to learn that [u] at the end of this word is written with A. It is not enough for the child to memorize which house is written with [s] and sour is written with [z], since the logic would be: "the [s] in the middle of two vowels has a sound of [z]?" In this way the child would be memorizing and not understanding. What, then, would it take to know how to decipher writing and read a word? Another point we bring up is the fact that the child needs to decipher what is written. The act of deciphering – coming out of the cocoon of the unknown of lexical meaning – is the most important aspect of the whole literacy process. The meaning of each word or text then apprehended becomes automatic. If the child discovers and understands that it is written, for example, the word hanger, he has understood, and once as a speaking subject of the Portuguese is acquainted with the word hanger.

This time, literacy becomes more complex as "the cocoon needs to be broken". It is from word by word that the child comes across sentences in a text situation. But, as children's speech is not based on texts, it needs to pay more attention to the whole set of words and not just to each one in isolation. However, it is not necessary for teachers to adopt the posture of thinking that every child has difficulties to understand what is written in the activities, but rather to explain the process, in order to make the transition from the oral modality to the writing of the language simpler, using activities that introduce individualized or collective reading.

Most of the problems that occur in this process come from the immediate response without generating understanding. It was possible to identify this practice in the classroom, in the observed class: the teacher, at all times, delivered the "ready" answers to the students, which compromised their full understanding. In the same way, teachers need to use oral vocabulary and materials – reading texts – according to the child's age, that is, with an appropriate vocabulary. Instead of reading something



like "she had white hair like snow," why not read "she had white hair"? We also emphasize that the curricular structure of the school needs to be focused on the child's linguistic needs. We found statements with complex words for the children's linguistic background, with commands that generated doubts about understanding what the exercise asked them to do. A conscious linguistics is one that deciphers the meaning of each syllable set, it is not "a monster that lives under the bed".

The act of deciphering does not mean understanding everything in its entirety. First, it is necessary to convert the oral modality into a written one. And this understanding is related to several other factors, for example the continuing education of educators, the reformulation of the school curriculum, because without this the literacy process will not occur, and our little butterfly will not come out of the cocoon.

Letting the child alone come and find out how a word should be spelled is a constant mistake, because it does not stimulate the understanding of how the writing of what is spoken is done. The child must be led to understand language in such a way that he is able to identify the ways in which he appropriates language.

The linguistic notions that define the signifier to the signified to form an acoustic image (SAUSSURE, 2012) (the child's individual meaning about some lexia) occur from the moment the child is able to join the sonority of each syllabic pair of the word (CAGLIARI, 2009). It is at this stage that the acoustic image is formed, as the child is able to identify what he is reading and gives due meaning to it. The cat becomes a meowing animal, and has whiskers and is written with [g], while the fish is discovered as a small animal that swims and is written with [p].

And when it comes out of the cocoon, "our little butterfly" discovers a whole world in which it is possible to represent on the sheet of paper the respective sonority of everything it says, and just like the "adults" this "butterfly" will begin to glide under the alphabet when it begins to express itself through writing.

3 THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEECH FOR LEARNING TO WRITE

First, we highlight how necessary it is to listen to children and let them speak. The school should not only be concerned with spelling, but also with the functioning of speech. The Portuguese spoken in Brazil is not yet considered a separate language, distant and different in totality from the Portuguese spoken in the world, but many studies already characterize it as Brazilian (PERINI, 2010; BAGNO, 2004), although the school itself is not attentive to this evidence.

When a child arrives at the school environment, he or she already has a linguistic background related to speech. This little butterfly begins its process of metamorphosis towards the final stage of literacy, consisting of previous knowledge related to the oral modality, and acceptable by the conventions that the linguistic system allows.



Before teaching how the language works, the school should encourage speaking and show how it works. According to Cagliari (2009), language actually exists through people's speech and is only there fully realized. In a language there are different sound values for each alphabetic symbol and spelling alone does not give us clear guidance on the pronunciation of the language and its dialects. Difficulties in recognizing speech sounds are often added to difficulties in trying to explain orthography from speech.

Separating the letters that make up the alphabet into vowels and consonants will only make sense to the child if these letters represent the sounds present in his speech, these will be, in the future, classified as vowels and consonants, according to phonetic notions.

In children's speech, vowels and consonants represent different articulatory modes. The attention paid to consonants is not as instructive as it could be, and it is not as different as attention to vowels. It is common for children to be unable to distinguish between phonic pairs, as well as voiceless sounds from voiced sounds – b/w, f/v, t/d. The distinction between voiceless and voiced consonants also depends on the dialect in which the child speaks.

In a classroom, there are students from various regions of the country, there we also find a variety of different pronunciations for children's spelling mistakes. Therefore, we highlight the importance of the school respecting and understanding the dialects, that is,

the school must respect the dialects, understand them, and even teach how these varieties of the language work by comparing them with each other; These must include the prestige dialect itself, under conditions of linguistic equality. The school should also show students that society assigns different social values to different ways of speaking the language and that these values, although based on prejudices and false interpretations of linguistic right and wrong, have very serious economic, political and social consequences for people. (CAGLIARI, 2009, p. 71).

Cagliari (2009) shows how little we learn during several years of study and how schools, even naively, have difficulty in assessing how much a child in the literacy process has been able to learn. For this reason, the school lacks to distinguish speech problems from writing problems, because speech has an infinity of dialects and orthographic writing is the only use of the Portuguese language that does not admit variation. Therefore, learning the Portuguese would not only be learning how the language and its varieties work, but also studying linguistic uses as much as possible, and this does not only mean reading and writing, but also includes training to understand linguistic varieties, especially the standard dialect.

For the student, respecting linguistic varieties means understanding his world and others, a student will never be able to come to the conclusion that his parents, or the people in his environment, are incapable of the "wrong" way of speaking, much less feel diminished by it. Because this type of prejudice, from being passed down from generation to generation, is ingrained in society. If students learn to value linguistic varieties, societies will tend to change their behavior towards this prejudice



and will have a more appropriate attitude towards linguistic differences. In writing, for example, "the little butterfly" begins its process of change, because it is from this moment that it begins to correlate and understand which graphic symbols represent each word it speaks.

We live in a world where writing is of paramount importance, both for communication and for children's literacy.

This process requires us to have some notions about the use of the language in different regions of the country, if we are in the position of linguist-educators in a literacy classroom, because it is important to understand how those children pronounce words due to regional aspects. However, the teaching of the Portuguese language in schools is linked to a single type of norm and is more concerned with the appearance of the letter than with the message that the student wants to convey, or his attempt to write. So

Writing is a new activity for the child, and for this very reason it requires special treatment in literacy. It is expected that the child, at the end of a year of literacy, will know how to write and not that he will know how to write everything and with absolute correctness. This is an important point and one that relegates to a secondary plane the concern with spelling during the first school year. (CAGLIARI, 2009, p. 82, emphasis added).

With this, we understand that it is not just a matter of teaching how to write, but of explaining what writing is. In the words of Cagliari (2009), "[...] the school teaches how to write without teaching what it is to write [...]". It is necessary for the student to know that writing is a matter of attempts, discoveries and personal experimentation, it is a process that requires motivation.

Throughout the literacy process, children will write more, motivated by elaborate exercises whose purpose is restricted to the production of texts and writing training. This requires students to write more and more, without a logic, without a reason with themes chosen by the teachers themselves. Like this

many students have to write essays on absurd topics, such as "Grandma's Farm", "Pingo d'água" and others; in most cases, they do not get the real chance, at school, to write what they would like and in the way they would like [...] the way the school treats writing easily leads many students to hate writing and, consequently, reading [...]. (GAGLIARI, 2009, p. 87).

Consequently, writing at school demotivates the student, in the sense that he does not have the opportunity to write about topics that are common to him. However, we need to read and write for some reason and this justifies the child's desire to write. This taste is lost over the years at school for the reasons already explained in this chapter.

The writing system has a direct or indirect commitment to the sounds of a particular language, in the writing system of the Portuguese language, we use different types of alphabets, letters, characters of an ideographic nature, punctuation marks and numbers. Each letter has a phonetic segment such as: knife [fakɔ]. Another point is the diacritics such as: acute accent, grave accent, tilde, circumflex accent



and also question mark, exclamation point, period, ellipsis and quotation marks. In our system we have letters, numbers, acronyms, ideographic signs, among others, which is of paramount importance for the alphabet, having as its main base the letter. And this tangle of graphic symbols that give dynamics to the words when spoken represent real challenges to children's understanding.

At first, the literacy process begins with the writing of small scribbles, with strokes and lines, which reveal an attempt to write something that has been imagined. After all, the little butterfly is developing. However, most schools do not allow the child to start learning little by little, from the beginning they impose rules on students. This time, "to start writing, children do not need to study grammar, as they have already mastered the Portuguese language in its oral modality" (CAGLIARI, 2009). This is why many students, during literacy, choose the letters according to the sound of the word, so they end up using a letter that corresponds more to their expectations to the rules imposed, for example: dici (said), susego (quiet), licho (garbage), cei (sei).

Some "spelling mistakes" made by children occur around the structure of the word, such as the intervocalic junction and segmentation: "*eucazeicoela*" (I married her). The way to spell letters, or the improper use of uppercase and lowercase letters in addition to graphic accentuation is very common, and accentuation in particular is not taught at the beginning of learning, for this reason there are many words without accents in the texts. For example: you (you), not (no). At this stage, the butterfly is already in the "cocoon", almost ready to break through it towards the world of writing.

To this end, we start from the principle that reading is essential, not only in the school context, but as an agent of insertion of this individual in the linguistic society for the rest of his life. For this, students need to have the teaching of writing combined with the practice of reading simultaneously, which often does not occur because the school does only one or the other. It is of paramount importance that the teacher adopts a posture of guiding this child, showing him that speech and writing are not substitutable for each other, but need to coexist together, reading is the achievement of the objective of writing (CAGLIARI, 2009, p. 131).

It is up to the literacy teacher to have the necessary tools to help them during the literacy, reading and literacy process. It is necessary for the teacher to consider the student's reading, because the familiarity that the student already has with his or her idiolect will make the literacy process easier and smoother (CAGLIARI, 2009).

Reading is a decipherment of the written code that the reader must decode, understanding what has been written he will be able to make a reading understanding of what has been read. For the child to read a text, it is necessary to first let him study it, decipher it, as well as practice his reading (CAGLIARI, 2009, p. 141).

Reading requires the reader to reconcile a series of biological factors that occur during this process in a natural way. While the child is engaged in the exercise of reading, his body becomes a



complex activity, for example: changing the breathing, adjusting the rhythm, the accent and the intonation. Regarding the decoding of the letters, they present themselves to the student as a new world of knowledge that he is acquiring. For example, uppercase letters differ from lowercase letters; Cursive writing differs and from stick writing, handwriting from one teacher to another also presents a challenge to comprehension.

And the child must know to the point of not being confused all these differences, because it is this salad of information that the school expects to occur in the minds of the children, but that has never been taught to them.

Therefore, for children inserted in the family social field, until the moment they are enrolled in school, all this information is strictly new and must be treated in a tenuous and careful way, in order to avoid gaps in their learning, which can compromise their future learning.

4 FINAL THOUGHTS

The advent of writing was a historical process of constructing a system that aimed at representation and not a process of codification. At the beginning of schooling, the systems that represent language are presented, as to what expresses language and the numerical system. The difficulties faced by children in the early grades, more specifically in literacy, are those related to the concept, that is, the meaning to which the constructions of the system are attributed.

Thus, faced with this obstacle, it is common for children to reinvent their systems, starting from writings that resemble the sound of words (nest – ninio), or mirrored writing (E - 3). The writing of the alphabet can be considered as a system that graphically represents a grapheme, as opposed to the writing in ideographs that express conceptual significance. Therefore, we consider our writing to be a code that converts graphemes into phonemes.

In view of this finding, we realize that due to the sound arbitrariness of some graphemes in which their phonetic representation is the same, some cases related to difficulties in literacy are due to the confusion that occurs in the minds of children related to: which letter represents a certain sound?

Therefore, the learning of the written modality, understood by us as finally understood, takes place through the conscious construction or representation of a system (graphemes). Even if one knows how to speak within what is considered "adequate" and makes the correct perceptions about each word-forming grapheme, this cannot be considered as ideal, because the student can be an expert copyist, for having memorized and not understood.



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