

MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION IN BRAZIL: A BATTLE OF TWO WORLDS

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Abstract

Considered as both the salvation of the educational system *and* the main agent in the failure of the schooling process, mother tongue education in Brazil is a battlefield between the traditional or grammatical paradigm and the socio-interactionist paradigm. The battle occurs on several fronts from academy to textbook to law, and those who defend the socio-interactionist paradigm are winning most of them. However, the imminent victory of this paradigm can be problematic. The new paradigm needs to consider its excessive pragmatism and utilitarianism, among other difficulties, beyond the classroom. The socio-interactionist paradigm also needs to prove that it is capable of success in an area in which failure seems to be the rule, as shown by institutional evaluations of mother tongue education.

Dutch. Samenvatting [translation Tanja Janssen]

Het moedertaalonderwijs in Brazilië wordt tegelijkertijd gezien als redding van het onderwijssysteem en als hoofdoorzaak van het falen van het scholingsproces, en vormt een strijdperk tussen enerzijds het traditionele of grammaticale paradigma en anderzijds het sociaal-interactionistische paradigma. De strijd vindt plaats op verschillende fronten, zowel op school, in schoolboeken als in wetten. De voorstanders van sociaal-interactionistische opvatting lijken aan de winnende hand. Een overwinning van dit paradigma kan echter problematisch zijn. Het nieuwe paradigma is extreem pragmatisch en utilitair. Dit probleem, en andere problemen moeten onder ogen worden gezien. Het nieuwe paradigma moet ook bewijzen dat

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het succesvol kan zijn op een terrein waar mislukkingen eerder regel dan uitzondering zijn, zoals blijkt uit evaluaties van moedertaalonderwijs op scholen.

French. Résumé [Transation aurence Pasa]

Considéré à la fois comme salut du système éducatif et agent principal dans l'échec du processus de scolarisation, l'enseignement de la langue maternelle au Brésil fait l'objet d'un débat vigoureux entre le paradigme traditionnel, ou grammatical, et le paradigme socio-interactionniste. La querelle concerne plusieurs plans, des attentes académiques aux instructions officielles, en passant par les manuels, et les tenants du paradigme socio-interactionniste dominant le plus souvent. Néanmoins, la victoire imminente de ce paradigme ne va pas de soi. Ce nouveau paradigme doit notamment s'interroger sur un pragmatisme et un utilitarisme excessifs, qui va au-delà de la salle de classe. Le paradigme socio-interactionniste doit également montrer qu'il est capable de succès dans un secteur où l'échec semble être la règle, comme le montrent les évaluations institutionnelles de l'enseignement de la langue maternelle.

German. Zusammenfassung. [Translation Irene Pieper]

Muttersprachlicher Unterricht in Brasilien: ein Kampf zweier Welten
Der muttersprachliche Unterricht in Brasilien wird sowohl als Retter des Bildungssystems wie als Hauptagens seines Scheiterns verstanden. Er zeigt sich als Kampfplatz zwischen dem traditionellen oder grammatikorientierten Paradigma und dem sozio-interaktionistischen. Der Kampf spielt sich an unterschiedlichen Fronten ab. Sie reichen vom akademischen Kontext über das Lesebuch bis in den Bereich des Rechts, und diejenigen, die das sozio-interaktionistische Paradigma verteidigen, gewinnen meistens. Dieser Erfolg allerdings ist durchaus kritisch zu betrachten. Das neue Paradigma muss insbesondere in Bezug auf seinen exzessiven Pragmatismus und Utilitarismus befragt werden. Das sozio-interaktionistische Paradigma muss hingegen noch den Beweis antreten, dass es tatsächlich zu Erfolgen in denjenigen Bereichen führt, in denen Misserfolg – wie Evaluationen muttersprachlichen Unterrichts zeigen – quasi die Regel ist.

Polish. Streszczenie [translation Elzbieta Awramiuk]

Traktowane jako ratunek dla systemu edukacyjnego bądź główny czynnik niepowodzeń procesu kształcenia nauczanie języka ojczystego w Brazylii stanowi pole bitwy między tradycyjnym lub gramatycznym paradygmatem a paradygmatem socjo-interakcjonistycznym. Bitwa odgrywa się na kilku frontach, od uniwersytetu przez podręcznik do prawa. Ci, którzy bronią modelu socjo-interakcjonistycznego, zwyciężają na większości z nich, jednakże szybkie zwycięstwo tego modelu może być problematyczne. Nowy paradygmat musi wziąć pod uwagę – obok innych trudności – swój nadmierny pragmatyzm i utylitarizm. Socjo-interakcjonistyczny paradygmat musi także dowieść, że potrafi odnieść sukces tam, gdzie – jak pokazują instytucjonalne sprawdziany efektywności kształcenia w języku ojczystym – niepowodzenia wydają się regułą.

Portuguese Resumo. [Translatation Paulo Feytor-Pinto]

Considerado tanto a salvação do sistema educativo como o principal agente do insucesso do processo de escolarização, o ensino da língua materna no Brasil é o campo de batalha entre o paradigma gramatical ou tradicional e o paradigma sócio-interacionista. A batalha tem lugar em muitas frentes, da academia aos manuais escolares e à legislação, e os que defendem o paradigma sócio-interacionista parece estarem a ganhar na maior parte delas. Porém, a iminente vitória deste paradigma pode ser problemática. O novo paradigma deve ter em conta, entre outras dificuldades, o seu pragmatismo e utilitarismo excessivos. O paradigma sócio-interacionista também tem que provar a sua capacidade de sucesso numa área em que o insucesso parece ser a regra, como o mostram avaliações institucionais de ensino da língua materna.

Key words: socio-interactionism – literary education – reading teaching – writing teaching – normative grammar – Brazilian educational system

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 70's, a Brazilian economist defined the country as “Belindia”, meaning that in Brazil we had small rich regions that were like Belgium and huge poor regions like

India. Nowadays, although the regional contrasts of social and economic development that gave rise to the expression are not the same, statistics on development in Brazil are still not comforting. In education, the fight *against* illiteracy and *for* the schooling of children (old Latin American issues) improved greatly: the illiteracy of the population over 10 years old fell from 15.6%, in 1993, to 3.5%, in 2003 (IBGE, 2003) and the government celebrated in 2002 the virtual universality (96.9%) of school access to children from 7 to 14 years old. Unfortunately, this wider school access does not mean that children stay at school, as the data from the populations of medium schooling, and from school evasion and drop out rates (INEP, 2003) show. Neither has teaching and learning quality risen, at least as measured by international tests, such as PISA/2000¹, (and also national ones, as SAEB² and ENEM³). Each of these shows that Brazilian students appear to have difficulties reaching competences suitable to their schooling level.

These data have generated an enormous pressure on mother tongue education, which is considered as both the salvation of the educational system *and* the main agent in the seeming failure of the schooling process.

Actually, this pressure comes from the very history of Portuguese language teaching in Brazil. The change in the name and in the orientation of the Portuguese language discipline during the last century shows that the definition of what and how to teach the mother tongue has been a field of conflict in Brazil. According to Soares (2001), issuing out of the old divisions of the *Jesuit Ratio Studiorum*, the disciplines of Portuguese language education were essentially *rhetoric*, *grammar* and *poetics* until the 1940s. Following social and economic modifications from the 1950s, which shifted populations from the countryside to the cities, this profile changed, with grammar study becoming more prevalent. In the 1970's, due to legal changes (Law# 5692/71) and new directions from communication theory (among other factors), the amount of grammar study lessened and the discipline gained a new name: *Communication and Expression*. In the second half of the 1980s, the re-democratisation of the country, the influence of several branches of linguistics and growing developments in the field of reading gave a new face to the discipline that returned to its former name: *Portuguese language*.

All these changes resulted in a kind of crusade now fought on many fronts. The contenders are, on the one side, those who defend traditional mother tongue education, based on normative grammar, as the discipline was defined between the years

¹ PISA is the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment. It is an internationally standardised assessment that was jointly developed by participating countries and is administered to 15-year-olds in schools. PISA 2000 covered the domains of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy not merely in terms of mastery of the school curriculum, but in terms of important knowledge and skills needed in adult life.

² SAEB is the national system for evaluation of Basic Education in Brazil carried out on a bi-annual basis since 1993. SAEB evaluates students from the last year of each cycle at both Fundamental and Secondary levels. The students are tested on two disciplines: Portuguese and Mathematics.

³ ENEM is the National Exam for Medium Education, in use since 1998. ENEM is carried out on an annual basis and has the purpose of measuring student performance at this educational level.

1940 and 1950. On the other side are those who look to a transformation of mother tongue education based on the conception of the language as human interaction⁴.

In order to gain a better picture of the present state of this crusade between the traditional or grammatical paradigm and the socio-interactionist paradigm, we will divide the scene of battle into several fronts: the academic front, the institutional front, the instructional material front and the school front, while presenting specific discussion on the issue of literary education.

2. THE ACADEMIC FRONT

Judging from the number of books, essays, seminars and congresses that deal with the teaching of Portuguese Language from a socio-interactionist perspective, any observer of this front would have no trouble reaching the conclusion that grammar teaching no longer finds a place in the academic world. From the many texts that approach this matter, we will discuss three which present a synthesis of the situation.

The first two of these, in fact, enact a dialogue and were written by prestigious grammarians. The first is a collection of articles with the title *Língua e liberdade* (*Language and Liberty*), written by Celso Luft (1985) and originally first published in newspapers. Luft, who was also a dictionary author and wrote many textbooks and manuals of orthography, criticises what he calls the “grammaticalist” obsession that leads to oppressive and alienating teaching of the mother tongue. Against this kind of teaching, he presents linguistic theory, using as support principles mainly developed by Chomsky. According to Luft, traditional grammar courses are useless, naïve, mistaken and potentially harmful, the more so because they are centred in the exceptions rather than in linguistic regularities – thus highlighting archaic uses of language in which exercises are given so as only to apply and correct grammatical rules. Recognising that the general picture of mother tongue education is far from ideal, the author concludes that it is necessary to fight for a mother tongue education which can improve students’ language skills. In this way, the students, empowered by language, will be able to express freely their creativity and spirit of criticism.

The second book under consideration, *Ensino da gramática: opressão? liberdade?* (*Teaching of grammar: Oppression? Freedom?*), was written by Evanildo Bechara (1985). Himself also a renowned grammarian, Bechara wants to keep the traditional

⁴ *The socio-interactionism defenders used to present their ideas in opposition to traditional or grammatical teaching. Geraldi (1991), one of the first scholars to argue for a change in the mother tongue education toward a socio-interactionist paradigm, contends that in traditional teaching, language is just an expression of thoughts, whereas for socio-interactionism, language is a place where social relationships and identities are forged. From this primary distinction, other oppositions are built around methodological and schooling issues. For socio-interactionism, for instance, there are no ‘errors’ in language, only mistaken varieties of use. Socio-interactionism also claims that the actual practice of the language in the classroom is more important than teaching a metalanguage. Thus, mother tongue education should be centred in language use and not be about grammatical categories in the fashion of traditional grammar.*

teaching of normative grammar. For this author, linguistics must contribute to language teaching, but the current state of linguistic research in Brazil, especially that inspired by the American academy, has brought disastrous innovations to Brazilian mother tongue education. This is because linguistics is pitted against the traditional teaching of grammar. For Bechara, this has meant schools leaving behind the study of written language patterns. He also blames the view that sees a normative grammar as elitist, and nothing more than the linguistic variant of the dominant class. In spite of his position supporting normative grammar teaching, Bechara does not see the grammatical paradigm as static. On the contrary, using Italian linguists as support, he suggests that grammar teaching should be integrated with linguistic education. This linguistic education has as its purpose the creation and development of student's linguistic competences. The school's and the teacher's responsibility, states Bechara, is to make the student a polyglot in his own language.

Ten years later came *Gramática e interação: uma proposta para o ensino de gramática no 1.º e 2.º graus* (Grammar and interaction: a proposal for the teaching of grammar in the 1st and 2nd levels), written by Luiz Carlos Travaglia (1995). The proposal enunciated in the title seems to reconcile the opposing sides of the grammatical and the socio-interactionist paradigms, but it is actually a synthesis of the latter for a broad public. Travaglia systematises what had been discussed for the previous decade as a new model of mother tongue education. The author points out that the development of the student's discursive competence is the goal of mother tongue education. This aim is achieved when teachers, relinquishing the rules and taxonomy of normative grammar, give the student many opportunities for communicative interaction. Then, arguing that traditional grammar is a mere manual of fine language rules, the author enlarges the concept of grammar not only to incorporate the many ways of studying the language – normative grammar, descriptive grammar, grammar of use, implicit grammar, explicit grammar, theoretical grammar, contrastive grammar, general grammar, historical grammar and comparative grammar – but also to introduce the main points of a new paradigm. These include the treatment of linguistic variation and the new notions of text and discourse. He also requires diversity and plurality in the linguistic interaction of the classroom. Finally, he proposes the grammar of use as the centre of mother tongue education, which should be practised in three different kinds of classes. One is the reading class, which consists of the practice of understanding written texts while studying meaning in specific communicational situations. Another is the writing class, based on text production, which stresses the selection and ordination of linguistic resources needed for communicational interaction. Finally, the grammar class enacts analysis of the language elements subordinated to the guidelines given in the two previous classes – and, thus, is far from traditional grammar exercises.

The presentation of a well-articulated proposal, including directions for activities, as presented by Travaglia, shows us, on the one side, the strengthening of the socio-interactionist paradigm within the Brazilian academy. Travaglia's version of this paradigm is much more than a set of general concepts about mother tongue education. It presents systematic and systematised linguistic principles and pedagogical practices to be followed by the teacher. Travaglia's book has had several editions

and they attest to the wide range of his synthesis. On the other side of the debate, traditional grammar teaching is not openly defended. In fact, there is on-going publication of new texts that turn away from a normative grammar approach to mother tongue education. As a sample, we have the relatively recent publishing of *Gramática, nunca mais* (*Grammar, never more*), by Luís Carlos Rocha (2002), the curious title of which links traditional grammar teaching to the authoritarian practices and human rights violations of the last Brazilian dictatorship.

3. THE INSTITUTIONAL FRONT

The diagnosis of crises in the teaching of Portuguese language usually locates the origin of all problems in the 1970s. Both sides of the debate agree that problems began when the primary and secondary education system was widened to people that had been, until then, excluded. First, there were not enough teachers to meet the expansion of the educational system. This brought to the school unprepared teachers. These new teachers took the textbook-as-solution approach to teaching to overcome their lack of knowledge. These textbooks adopted the communicational approach without considering the educational context of Brazil. Finally, because of the political context, nothing of this was discussed at the time.

These crises lead, on the one side, to reinforcing the traditional teaching of grammar and, on the other side, to new proposals for mother tongue education. On the institutional front, two texts are landmarks to the details of the dispute. The first is the Report written by the Commission assigned to establish directions for the improvement of mother tongue education. This Commission, which assembled grammarians, linguists and educators of national renown, was the first answer given by the government (coming out of the dictatorship period) to the outcry over the crisis in mother tongue education. Published at the end of December 1985, the report caused surprise. Contrary to what might have been expected from an assembly of grammarians, it gave room to some aspects of the new proposals and refused to put grammar teaching back in place.

Discussion within the document covered language denomination, Brazil's minority languages and the influence of the media on the Portuguese language. The Commission established the general aim of mother tongue education as being mastery of the so-called *language of culture*. This notion avoided the sense of elite norm or standard language, opting instead for a universality which would unify the mother tongue and, at the same time, allow linguistic variety. The Commission explicitly recommended that mother tongue education should consider grammar as a learning tool for the student but not be the centre of teaching practice. This direction is clearer when the Commission separates the first eight years (first or fundamental level) of education from the other three (second or medium level), advising that the initial years should deal with the uses and practice of language, and that grammatical theory should be studied in the secondary years.

By refusing to give centrality to grammar teaching and privileging the practice of language over metalinguistic reflection, the Report, which was published and distributed all over the country, strengthened the new paradigm. Soon, a number of

educational programs and laws in the states and cities followed the Report and supported the new mother tongue education proposals. This legal endorsement, added to academic support, would favour, more than a decade later, the elaboration of the National Curricular Parameters (PCNs).

Conceived in the socio-interactionist perspective, the PCNs for Portuguese language present the grammatical paradigm as a problem to be solved and put behind. PCNs aim at linguistic and discursive *competences*. These are defined as: action through language; access to cultural goods and critical inclusion in the written world. Thus, the social and interactive nature of language is stressed. Texts are regarded as a product of discursive activity and as objects historically and socially constrained. The basic focus of mother tongue education is broken down into listening, reading and the production of texts – the latter being the consequence of reflection and analysis. Also stressed are the diversity and plurality of current social texts; respect for linguistic variety; the exploration of meaning construction; the search for the expressive resources of verbal language; the necessity of effective interlocution; the attention to the enunciation conditions of the text in any use of the language and the search for cohesion and coherence in the processing of texts.

The pragmatic character of this view of mother tongue education is in sharp contrast to the content-centred practices of the previous paradigm. The treatment given to grammar also reveals the strong differences between the two models. In the directions for the first four years of fundamental education, grammar study is restricted to the practice of rewriting texts and to language knowledge that the student already brings with him/her to school. Topics in grammar must be used only to solve problems and questions that cannot be answered by other means. In the directions to the last four years of this level of education, the PCNs not only emphasise traditional grammar as mere support for teaching but also refuse to give it the status of a guide to linguistic analysis. In this latter case, what is regarded as more worthy is the student's reflection on the language rather than the reconstruction of grammatical nomenclature, if only because there are mistakes in the normative grammar. In medium level education, the concept of grammar is expanded to the other disciplines that integrate the Language, Codes and Technology area, viz. Portuguese language, Foreign language, Informatics and Artistic and Physical Education. In this manner, grammar becomes a description of the way of organising any language. Even here, the emphasis remains on grammatical study being subordinated to the effective use of language. Finally, grammar even has its standardising function reduced, with the recognition that the language is constantly revising and elaborating itself. In sum, there is no more place for the traditional grammar lesson in the discipline of Portuguese language.

Although they were not received without controversy, the PCNs represented the victory of the socio-interactionist paradigm. Its partisans took this as governmental sanction for their perspective on mother tongue education. However, as the PCNs are presented as directions and not rules to be followed, they allow the existence of other models and proposals for mother tongue education. Thus, the grammatical paradigm is still present in the schools side by side with the more easily assimilated innovations contained in the PCNs – mainly in the private education system, which is more susceptible to the pressures of conservative forces in society.

4. THE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL FRONT

In the Brazilian educational market, textbooks are a very important product because of large purchases by the government. Indeed, the government is the biggest buyer of textbooks in the country. Between the years 1994 and 2003, more than 915 million units of books were acquired and distributed to an annual group of 30.8 million students, enrolled in thousand of public schools at the fundamental level of education. In 2005, the government bought more than 93 million textbooks for about 35 million students of the fundamental schools. In 2006, it bought more than 12 million textbooks for medium level education, beginning with Portuguese Language and Mathematics, to be distributed to about 1.4 million students in the north and north-east regions of the country.

Because of the importance of textbooks in the Brazilian educational system, in 1985 the National Program of the Textbook (PNLD) was created, dedicated to selecting and buying this material. Under this program, each student in fundamental education receives, for free, one book for each discipline (Portuguese Language, Sciences, Mathematics, History, Geography). He/She keeps these books for one year and then returns them to the school, which will loan them to other students for two more years. The success of PNLD has been so great that it was extended to Braille books, books for the medium level of education and dictionaries. In the case of dictionaries, distribution of which reaches 38.9 million students, there is no necessity of returning them to the school. They become the student's personal property.

Any publishing house can present a book to PNLD. However, the set of rules for book presentation to the PNLD has several quality assurance requirements. These range from the material presentation of the books to an evaluation of the pedagogy. This pedagogic evaluation is made by a group of specialists, who determine what books are proper to be listed in the *Guia de Livros Didáticos (Textbooks Guide)*. The Guide goes to the schools, where the teachers and the pedagogic team select the books they see as most fit to their work in the classroom. The PNLD buys only the textbooks chosen by the school.

This double process of selection is, in general, positive. The first evaluation of the textbooks, the one made by specialists, has brought a great contribution to the quality of the Brazilian textbook. We no longer find the prejudices, conceptual mistakes, broken information or absence of essential data that were common before the PNLD. In the evaluation made by teachers, there is the possibility of selection without restriction, even if it is made from a given list. This also encourages interaction between Principals and teachers as they discuss and analyse together the textbooks presented in the Guide.

There is no doubt the first selection made by PNLD bears consequences for mother tongue education. Uniformity of presentation is a side effect difficult to avoid with such large purchases. This uniformity affects the contents as well. These tend to be universalised or at least nationalised, erasing regional differences and establishing a common pattern in pedagogic approach. This is a result of the national distribution of books and from the impossibility of small, local publishing houses competing with the big publishing houses, most of which are located in the south or

the south-east regions. There is an attempt to correct these problems in some way within the PNLD, but success is still not evident.

It is specifically in the phase of the specialist's evaluation that influence over mother tongue education happens. Even if the procedures for choosing do not aim to limit possibilities, and, in fact, even state the necessity for a plurality of perspectives, the criteria established in the legal principles point very clearly to the new paradigm. The Portuguese Language books for the fundamental level of education must follow the PCNs and privilege real situations of language use in reading, writing and speech activities – as well as other principles of the socio-interactionist paradigm.

Thus, the pre-eminence of the socio-interactionist paradigm in the choice of textbooks is overwhelming, but the traditional paradigm is still reacting. Research conducted by a PNLD evaluation team about the language textbooks chosen by teachers showed that teachers preferred the textbooks which still remained linked, at some level, to the grammar paradigm and rejected those which were closer to socio-interactionist paradigm (Batista and Val, 2004)⁵. The grammar paradigm has also responded to the progressive erasure of normative grammar in textbooks with the so-called pedagogic grammars. These are normative grammars with exercises reproducing the traditional didactic textbooks, sometimes using literary texts (Cegalla, 1984). Indeed, these pedagogical grammars are not of recent invention, but have gained much more popularity due to the socio-interactionist changes to the general thrust of textbooks. Another important development is the revival in newspapers and even on TV of the old grammatical consultation. Very popular in the beginning of the last century, these are columns, such as physicians and psychologists used to have, dedicated to answering questions on normative grammar. As newspapers are being progressively used in schools, such columns themselves become references for students. There is also the success of grammatical dictionaries and manuals of style. The former work, in effect, as grammatical consultations, putting together the most common questions and adopting the form of a dictionary instead of questions and answers. The latter are directions the main publishing houses and newspapers of the country give to their journalists, made public due to the interest in rules for good usage – that is, they offer what any normative grammar offers.

The presence of such books in schools or in mother tongue education cannot be compared to the textbooks. However, they are indicators of the resistance to the new paradigm and/or of the dissatisfaction with student results in mastering the standard variety of the mother tongue. In any case, they have an “alternative” character, which attests to the dislocation of grammar from the centre of Portuguese language teaching. It is noteworthy that the PNLD provides dictionaries as auxiliary books for mother tongue education, but keeps silent about the manuals of grammar.

⁵ *In other research, Cayser (2001) found out that, even in textbooks approved by PNLD, the reading activities do not properly follow the PCN directions. Among other things, they analyse the text in small, isolated sections.*

5. THE SCHOOL FRONT

“Theory and practice are not the same”. This saying, very popular among teachers and students, seems to describe the situation which the socio-interactionist paradigm faces in the school. The first issue is the uneasiness that teachers feel in the absence of content to teach or of something that can be asked in a test. This happens because the new proposals emphasise competences and abilities to be achieved. They give priority to production over reflection. So, students have many activities to do but the teacher has little to directly teach in the classroom.

Dealing with this lack of content, the teacher usually chooses from the linguistic theories the content he/she thinks necessary to his/her work. Thus, in a clear transposition of traditional grammar teaching, the practice that supports mother tongue education turns out to be exercises and test-able content. For example, if the new direction is to work with genres of speech, the teacher understands his/her duty as teaching how to identify these genres and their markers, expecting the students to memorise a list of characteristics as useful as the old collective nouns list.

When the teacher is called to change such content-centred practices, he/she runs to the other side, viz. that in mother tongue education the most important thing is to provide the students with practical language activities. Portuguese language classes are then turned into a succession of meaningless and disconnected activities of listening, reading and the production of verbal and written texts. Without progression or any kind of ordering, these activities hardly result in effective learning. At best, they bring results well below expectations of standard norm competence. Consequently, the teacher puts aside the academic novelties and retreats to the old grammatical paradigm. His/Her feeling is that traditional education can be theoretically inadequate, but at least it works.

Such movement back to the grammatical paradigm seems to come from the same origin: the teacher’s education. No quantity of training or up-dating through courses can overcome a precarious academic education for the teacher. I am not going to deal here with the well-known process of the proletarianisation of teachers, but with the difficulties faced by them in incorporating the new paradigm into their classroom practices. One of these is related to the teachers’ undergraduate course. In Brazil, teachers study the Letters course. The curriculum of the Letters Course is structured into area blocks. This means that the disciplines of Linguistics, Literature and Pedagogy are set in parallel lines that never cross and compete with each other for the student’s attention. The attempts to end this isolation were not until now able to break down the borders of these disciplines. Newer arrangements are illustrated by the new Linguistics disciplines (*Linguistics Applied to Portuguese Language Teaching* and *Methodology of Portuguese Language Teaching*) and Literature disciplines (*Children’s Literature* and *Methodology of Literature Teaching*). However, not even the recent rule from the Conselho Nacional de Educação (National Council of Education – Resolution # 2/2002) that goes against the old curricula structure in teacher education (it dedicates the three first years to subjects linked to main areas and the last one to pedagogy) has reversed this trend of the separation of disciplines.

A further difficulty is that, coming from the popular classes and having received a very precarious basic education, the teacher him/herself does not master the nor-

mative grammar and shows deficiencies in written language. As the university has no place to deal with this kind of deficiency (on the contrary, it is assumed that, if the student got there, it was because he/she had mastered grammar) the student finishes the course insecure about his/her own language knowledge. As directions related to the standard norm are required by mother tongue teacher education, the new teacher looks to the normative grammar and textbook for help, following the path of his older colleagues.

Another kind of problem is the very structure of the school. It presents difficulties not usually considered during the teacher's initial training, nor in the articulation of the practices of the new paradigm. Analysing the impact of the new proposals for mother tongue education in a school designed to work as knowledge reproduction, Rosa Silveira (1991) calls attention to the inevitable obstacles that the teacher who follows the new ideas will face on a daily basis.

Among other things, the principle that the student is master of his/her language and respect for his/her reading choices and his/her rhythm as a reader are difficult options to adopt in a school that demands classroom control, the student's submission to the teacher's authority and the fulfilling of pre-determined activities. It is a school demand that activities shall be subject to measurement and control, as well being scheduled and done in a pre-set time. There is no place, then, for free activities, or any that may imply "loss of time". The school also standardises the student's behaviour and shows little tolerance for the subjectivity and personal expression needed for the development of the his/her discursive competence. This is not even to mention the classification of the students through grades and the encouragement of competition instead of co-operation. As Silveira stresses, in a school that grants prizes to personality traits such as self-control, obedience and submission, and punishes creativity, independence and frankness, the principles and practices of the socio-interactionist paradigm have few chances to succeed.

As a result, without a solid basis in school organisation, the progressive teacher education given by the academy tends to be wasted. When advanced by a committed teacher, it is opposed by a school that does not allow its full practice. Pressured, the teacher produces an awkward mixture of the two paradigms or just plainly accepts the school's and parents' imposition of the traditional paradigm, disguised by some new activities in reading and the production of texts. The parents and school argue that society needs to measure school success through performances easily tested and quantified. Thus, many schools have two disciplines: one in writing classes and the other in reading and grammar classes. The first is dedicated to isolated practices in the production of texts that, when not divided into the three classical forms of narration, description and dissertation, consist of showing the formal characteristic of a textual genre. The student then applies the rule using the old ever-present methodological couple, "precept" and "application". The second discipline is the traditional grammar class followed by reading and interpretation of newspaper texts or passages from the textbook. If the textbook does not take an approach based on explicit grammar teaching, the pedagogical grammar will provide it, with countless exercises. In some schools, there is also a reading program that consists of literature that shall be read at home and exchanged by all students month by month. The teacher's work is to register such exchanges.

Summarising, then, although victorious on many fronts, the socio-interactionist paradigm still faces difficulties in imposing itself right where the victory would be most crucial: in the classroom. Such difficulties have a powerful negative effect, because they end up working against the paradigm. To most parents' and teachers' eyes, these are difficulties inherent in the new paradigm itself, and they see it as proof that the new paradigm is unable to bring to reality the promises of improving mother tongue education without grammar. In this way, the silent resistance of the traditional paradigm against the academic "novelties" gains strength.

6. THE LITERARY EDUCATION ISSUE

Between the two paradigms, literature appears as a casualty of war. Traditionally, the relationship between literature and school was a partnership. From the school, literature gained the maintenance of the canon, through critical reading protocols, and the formation of consumers and producers who would feed the system. From literature, the school demanded a model of good writing in the mother tongue and proper material for the teaching of reading and the teaching of culture as national and artistic representation.

In the traditional paradigm of mother tongue education in Brazil, this partnership, inherited from Latin education, assigns distinct characteristics to literature and its methodology, according to educational level. In the fundamental level, literature is almost synonymous with reading, and bears the function of forming future readers, as well as reinforcing principles of morality and patriotism. Therefore, "literature" becomes confused with any written text that vaguely resembles poetry or fiction. The limit to the definition of "literature", indeed, is not given by this resemblance, but by theme and style – as both should be compatible with children's, teacher's and school's interests – preferably in the opposite order. The texts studied are usually fragments of literary works or texts specifically written for the school. The work done with these texts is so-called "text interpretation", which is really the search for data about the story in the text, and the use of text portions to identify and classify grammatical items.

At the secondary level, on the other hand, the objective is to familiarise the student with Brazilian literature. Under this aim, literature gains autonomy as a discipline separate from *Portuguese Language*, and named *Brazilian Literature*. Here, "literature" means the national canon or, rather, the history of Brazilian literature, usually understood chronologically. It is a succession of literary movements, and authors' biographical data, followed by theoretical glimpses of literary genres and a little about poetics and rhetoric, as figures of speech and poetic measurement. Literary texts are studied as fragments and are used mainly to demonstrate the characteristics of a particular literary movement.

Under a socio-interactionist paradigm, this partnership is rejected. Literature is no longer a measure of a reader's education, because the literary text is considered inappropriate as reading material or as a model for school writing. In the first place, literary style, being very creative and irregular, does not fit mother tongue education. This requires the standard language which is found in good newspapers and

scientific journals. Secondly, it is argued that the education of a competent language user relies on contact with a large and varied number of texts. For many teachers, only through the pragmatic use of written language can the student develop his/her discursive competence. Thirdly, reading is, as the socio-interactionist paradigm argues, an interactive process where the reader meets the author in the text. In this way, there is a strong emphasis on inferential processes that guide all reading. Because such processes can be subtle in literature, the teacher (and even some scholars) chooses to work with cartoons and journalistic texts, where irony and other textual mechanisms are much more transparent.

The literary canon is rejected because the texts are not sufficiently attractive. Teachers claim the old subjects and the old vocabulary and syntax fail to keep contemporary student interest. The rejection also ties in with political issues of canon building as it is discussed in the academy. Finally, the very centrality of the literary text in the school is considered inadequate. In a world where image and voice are much more intensely present than writing, it is argued that there is no reason for keeping the literary text as the main source of culture. There are movies, songs, TV shows and other cultural works that discard the written word, or use it in a secondary way. More than that, if one wants to teach culture, the school should become more modern and open the classrooms to contemporary practices, which are much more dynamic and do not, necessarily, include the reading of canonical literature.

Discarded in favour of journalism, advertisements, interviews, cartoons, movies and other cultural products under the socio-interactionist paradigm, literature loses the functions it had under the traditional paradigm and is progressively effaced from the school. In some states, "literature" has been abolished in the medium level of education. In the PCNs, literature is put in a secondary place by the argument that the definition of literature – the guardian of the nation's cultural written heritage – is no longer defensible, and that literature is just one discourse among many.

Based on the correct argument that the traditional paradigm did not work properly with literature, the new paradigm ends up usurping its place in mother tongue education. In this way, the pedagogic force of literature, which has an important role in the educational process not only in revealing the world of words, but also in creating the world and creating readers themselves through words, is gone. It is forgotten that aesthetic experience allows us knowledge of life through other people's experiences as well as vicariously living these experiences ourselves. In literary reading, we can be another person, we can live like another person and still be ourselves. This is why we internalise with such intensity the truth offered by poetry or fiction. This is why the experience of language and culture provided by literature cannot be absent from school.

7. CONCLUSION

Many other fronts could be presented, but those related here are enough from which to draw conclusions. It would appear that the total victory of the socio-interactionist paradigm that already dominates several fronts of mother tongue education is just a question of time. As we saw, the grammatical paradigm is already outmoded in the

academy, in the legislation, in the textbook and in literary education. The survival of old grammatical practices in the school does not pose a threat to the victorious paradigm.

Paradoxically, the socio-interactionist paradigm's very victory may weigh against it. Being the dominant theory, it will need to prove that it is capable of successfully reversing the poor results in mother tongue education which institutional evaluations ceaselessly point out. If students' failures in reading and writing persist, other solutions will be searched for, even in the form of retrogression to the grammatical paradigm. This is the political front of the socio-interactionist paradigm.

In addition, the new paradigm still has not obtained unity. When we look at the details of the theories we find discrepancies that have not been argued enough or satisfactorily decided. The case of linguistic variety or orality in the school illustrates this issue. All defenders of the socio-interactionist paradigm agree that it is necessary to respect the student's language variety and to take his/her linguistic knowledge as a starting point for mother tongue education. However, the point of arrival and the way to reach it are still not unanimous. For instance, there are those who support the idea of bidialectism and multidialectism, implying that the student needs to gain fluency in two or more language varieties. There are also those who claim that the students should be led from the private to the public uses of language, apparently rewriting the relations between speech and writing. There is also the distinction between the standard norm and the elite norm, though in many cases these are taken to be the same thing. There are those who argue that writing and speech are each simply modalities of the language, inscribing them as a continuity of genres and types of texts. There are those who argue against privileging writing in the school at the same time that there are those who consider mastery of the standard norm as represented in the written language as basic schooling. One demands equal treatment for language varieties but the other sees the final objective of language education as mastery of the elite norm. In the middle of such complex questions, it is not surprising that the teacher ultimately perceives this quarrel as just rhetorical varnish for the teaching of the elite norm as it always has been, through a normative grammar. He/She concludes, "I can teach the same thing, but I must say that I am constructing it differently". This is the identity front of the socio-interactionist paradigm.

Finally, there is an excessive emphasis on the pragmatic character of mother tongue education and a utilitarian conception of the language that gives room for resistance from the scholars of literature. In a text that deals with literary literacy, Zilberman (2003) points to the re-entrance of the old discipline, Rhetoric, in the model of mother tongue education praised by the PCNs. I have elsewhere (Cosson, 2004) called attention to the loss of cultural identity that comes from abandoning literature on behalf of the plurality and diversity of texts. The literary question is, thus, a point of interrogation inside the new paradigm. To call attention to it does not mean supporting traditional grammatical education, nor rejecting the socio-interactionist paradigm, but it is simply to state that mother tongue education cannot be imprisoned by pragmatism and utilitarianism.

Mother tongue education is complex and demands the public uses of language side-by-side with the private, the colloquial side-by-side with the formal, the aesthetic

side-by-side with the pragmatic and so on. Only by observing all these possibilities and searching for a way to promote their integration will we have a mother tongue education capable of fulfilling its role of fortifying and improving in subsequent generations the force and the vitality of the mother language.

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