

# THE REPRESENTATION OF TRUTH BY THE SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE: VIEWS TO A RUPTURE OF THE ACADEMIC LITERACY PARADIGMS

A REPRESENTAÇÃO DA VERDADE PELO DISCURSO CIENTÍFICO: VISTAS A UMA  
RUPTURA DE PARADIGMAS DO LETRAMENTO ACADÊMICO

LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE LA VERDAD POR EL DISCURSO CIENTÍFICO: HACIA UNA  
ROTURA DE PARADIGMAS DEL LETRAMIENTO ACADÉMICO

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**ABSTRACT:** This article discusses, from a theoretical perspective, the question of writing in the academic sphere. The particularities of the ways to read and write in this sphere constitute a world of literacies characterized by a formality that distinguishes it, purposely, from other use situations of these abilities. The appropriation and maintenance of the scientific discourse, however, require students' competences commonly not well developed during the years in basic education and which highlight the difficulties faced by both the student and the teacher in the transition to higher education. For the current discussion, I rely on literacy studies (STREET, 1984, 2003; KLEIMAN, 1995; HAMILTON, 2002) to deal, specifically, with academic literacy and the truth regime (FOUCAULT, 2004) through which the scientific discourse is legitimated in society.

**KEYWORDS:** Scientific discourse. Academic literacy. Ideological model of literacy. Truth regime.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo versa, a partir de uma perspectiva teórica, sobre a questão da escrita na esfera acadêmica. As particularidades dos modos de leitura e escrita nessa esfera constituem um mundo de letramentos caracterizado por uma formalidade que o distingue, propositalmente, de outras situações de uso dessas habilidades. A apropriação e a manutenção do discurso científico, no entanto, requerem do alunado competências usualmente pouco desenvolvidas ao longo de seus anos na educação básica e que realçam as dificuldades enfrentadas, tanto pelo aluno como pelo professor, na transição para o ensino superior. Para a corrente discussão, amparo-me nos estudos de letramento (STREET, 1984, 2003; KLEIMAN, 1995; HAMILTON, 2002) para tratar, especificamente, do letramento acadêmico e do regime de verdade (FOUCAULT, 2004) através do qual se legitima o discurso científico na sociedade.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Discurso científico. Letramento acadêmico. Modelo ideológico de letramento. Regime de verdade.

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RESUMEN: Este artículo versa, desde una perspectiva teórica, sobre el tema de la escritura en el ámbito académico. Las particularidades de los modos de lectura y escritura en esta esfera son un mundo de letramientos que se caracterizan por una formalidad que lo distingue a propósito de otras situaciones de uso de estas habilidades. La propiedad y el mantenimiento del discurso científico, sin embargo, requieren habilidades de los estudiantes por lo general poco desarrolladas a lo largo de sus años en la enseñanza básica y ponen de relieve las dificultades que tienen tanto el alumno como el profesor, en la transición a la educación superior. Para la discusión actual, me apoyan los estudios de letramiento (STREET, 1984, 2003; KLEIMAN, 1995; HAMILTON, 2002) para abordar específicamente el letramiento académico y el régimen de verdad (FOUCAULT, 2004) a través del cual el discurso científico está legitimado en la sociedad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Discurso científico. Letramiento académico. Modelo ideológico de letramiento. Régimen de verdad.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Science constitutes as such through specific discoursivization and technical apparatus, aimed at breaking the common-sense reading of the real. The language that gives form to an academic-scientific study consists of a standard of use of the language that, in addition to rigorousness and aesthetics, must be objective in the presentation of an investigation and/or in the proposition of reflections that need to exist in a given context.

Santos (1989) draws attention to the need of going farther than the simple evidences and primary reading codes to visualize a problem from another perspective, and this opinion can be brought even inside the universities, when students of many distinct courses discuss what science is and is not, or when professors of distinct knowledge areas also do so, as if it were possible to accommodate science in an architecturally flawless box with perfectly symmetrical and burr-free fittings, forgetting (precisely where this should not occur) that the purpose of a scientific study should not bring forth only new truths and definitions, but new ways of relating those that already exist, so that at some point it will be possible the emergence of a new concept or new understanding of information.

In any case, these relations and propositions require a certain standardization, and the writing by which they will propagate is of fundamental importance, not with regard to the choice of the national language, but to a universal articulation that supports the technical text and which was inherited from philosophy in a time when it was largely different of science, and its hegemonic character was much more visible than in the present days.

Pereira (2013, p.217) makes mention of Schopenhauer when he states that, in the time of this thinker, the philosophy's greater goal, "when it postulated the idea of *thinking for oneself*, was anchored in philosophical exercise and reflection, appropriating and dominating one's own knowledge", and that science "was still an effect of the combination of preexisting discourses". While philosophy used to speak in the first person, science used impersonality or universality, so that it did not see its enunciator, guaranteeing a neutral effect to the resistance and the validation of what one wants to affirm as truth. "We went through the nineteenth century thinking that *the* truth was *one* truth. In the twentieth century, we have come to see that *the* reason was one form of rationality and that man has no essence that precedes him" (PEREIRA, 2013, p. 221, emphasis added by the author).

Under this light, each truth becomes the expression of power mechanisms of who proposes it, who does so in order to control the origin of his discourse, although this origin lays on the discursive formations built throughout history and within which it is inscribed. However, it must not be forgotten that the very determination of the sense of truth is the result of a coercive process that develops in society and depends on it. "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general policy' of truth; that is, the types of discourse it embraces and makes work as true ones" (FOUCAULT, 2004, p.12), based on memories that access the already-said, authorizing certain meanings attributed to words and disallowing others.

It is important to emphasize here the relation that Cloran (2000) proposes between the meanings that are revealed by the author of a text through his experiences in the world, the linguistic mechanisms that make possible these processes of signification and the

context in which both are inserted, the subject and his experiences. The position occupied by the subject of the doing in a specific linguistic community is what sustains such a relation, which materializes the doing through the project of saying of that subject.

In this sense, the next sections propose to achieve a relation between the world experiences and the literacy practices reflected in the social doing, that is, in the writing mechanisms responsible for the identity social characterization, especially in the academic scope, with a view to understanding this process and basing on thematic discussions related to the Literacy Studies and, more specifically, on the importance of the academic literacy in society.

## 2 ON LITERACIES

The notion of literacy began to be used in Brazil during the 1980s and started to mature while emerged discussions stemming from the word literacy, in English, which carried a certain misunderstanding in Portuguese use due to the association with the concept of alphabetization.

Kleiman (1995), based on the seminal works of Brian Street (1984) and Hamilton along with Barton and Ivanic (1993), promotes an “attempt to separate studies on the ‘social impact of writing’ from alphabetization studies, whose school connotations emphasize individual skills in the use and practice of writing” (KLEIMAN, 1995, p.15), and which has come to be called as an autonomous model, since it does not consider the context influence on the performance of the practices.

Street (2003, p.77) highlights that the Literacy Studies represent a view of literacy that, instead of focusing on skill acquisition, similarly to what happens within traditional approaches, is as a social practice, so that there are multiple literacies capable of variation in time and space according to the power relations that configure these practices.

In a similar line of thought, Oliveira (2008, p.114) proposes that looking at the phenomenon of literacy

[...] as a social practice implies understanding that the actions of language and produced and interpreted by a cognitive subject, but also cleaved by interferences of the lived world from which he builds representations, beliefs, feelings, forms of social regulation and himself. So, there is not literacy shifted from the subject who makes it and from the context surrounding him.

Hamilton (2002, p. 8) works under the prism of discredit and devaluation attributed to many types of literacy, not considered socially valid or institutionalized, ignoring any experiences of literacy that are not described in supporting documents. In her reflection (HAMILTON, 2002, p. 4), the author contrasts the hegemonic literacies that she classifies as “institutionalized”, fostered, for example, by schools, churches, the workplace, the legal system, commerce, with the local “vernacular” literacies, which are not in turn regulated by institutions, but which arise in everyday life within local cultures. Being literate is not “simply a cognitive question, but it simultaneously involves other ways of engaging in the world” (HAMILTON, 2002, 183).

The almost inevitability of adherence to this ideological model of literacy is also discussed by Marcuschi (2001), given that in the current social context, the critical perspective<sup>1</sup> is of essential importance in working with reading and writing practices, along with an ethnographically situated approach and with the culturality that is part of the discursive domains of a social individual. However, the scholar deals with this understanding with some caution, not treating literacy with an exclusively social and political question. His ideal ideological model in the light of literacy would be that

[...] which begins with the observation of the relations between orality and literacy in the perspective of the *continuum* of social practices and communicative activities, partially involving the ideological model (especially

<sup>1</sup> This perspective shares the criticality postulated in the Critical Discourse Analysis, suggested by Fairclough (1989, p. 20), who proposes a conception of “language as a form of social practice”.

the aspect of insertion of speech and writing in the context of culture and social life) and observing the organization of linguistic forms in the *continuum* of textual genres (MARCUSCHI, 2001, p. 4).

There is a central position in Marcuschi's understanding about it. While he seeks to distance himself from the autonomous model, he also seeks not to approach the extreme of the ideological model. While linguistic issues must be linked to social, cultural, and political contexts, among others, the scholar draws attention to a path of dissociation from preoccupation with language if the ideological perspective of literacy is based largely on its contexts of use, which would denote the concern of a social or politician scientist, for example, rather than a scientist of language.

On this model of literacy, Kleiman (1995, p.21, emphasis mine) states that it does not exist “[...] a causal relation between literacy and progress or civilization<sup>2</sup>, or modernity, because, instead of dividing oral and literate groups, it *presupposes the existence, and investigates the characteristics, of large areas of interface between oral practices and literate practices*”.

This character is due precisely to the understanding that “[...] literacy practices, in the plural, are socially and culturally determined, and as such, the specific meanings that writing assumes for a social group depend on the contexts and institutions in which it was acquired” (KLEIMAN, 1995, p. 21).

Thus, the so-called literacy practices are, in fact, discursive practices that determine the production and interpretation of texts within certain contexts, that is, there is a relation of interdependence between context and practices, so that these latter, since they materialize according to the context of use, are ideologically constituted and, consequently, are not neutral. In this way, students should not be seen as empty members and not belonging to a society, since their life experiences are composed of a series of literacy events that emanate processes of signification to be manifested in due and timely moment.

Congruent to literacy practices, the literacy events, a notion coined by Heath (1983), correspond to any situation of involvement between one or more individuals with reading and writing practices, enabling them to integrate the nature of interactions between participants and the interpretation of them, and then taking the text as mediating object of the interaction.

In the context of events and practices, in which a phenomenon is only allowed to occur and produce signification from the other, it is necessary to look at another notion brought by Barton (1994), which seems to me quite coherent to deal with the academic literacy, in particular, that of *literacy worlds*. For this author, as well as for others already mentioned, literacy practices remain linked to the sociocultural context in which they occur. In this sense, it allows me to affirm that each social group participates in exclusive worlds of literacy, because the experiences it passes through are naturally distinct and differently significant.

In this respect, Dantas (2012, p. 44-45) highlights:

[...] the role of social spaces and social interactions that occur in them so that we can understand it as the stage of representations for multiple social practices, noting that the role played by writing and reading assumes a structuring character. However, attention is necessary to the fact that reading and writing do not circulate in the same way in all social contexts. The contribution of texts will necessarily obey the communicative needs of a community or groups of people, revealing which texts and practices constitute the literacy worlds of these groups.

In addition to that, in an article that discusses the worlds of literacy in research conducted by Tinoco (2008, 64) with teachers from the agreste of Rio Grande do Norte, in Brazil, and that integrates the book *Letramentos múltiplos: agentes, práticas, representações*, organized by Kleiman and Olivera, the author stresses:

<sup>2</sup> Literacy is nowadays understood as a set of social practices somehow linked to writing in specific contexts and with specific purposes. In this sense, there should not be an idea of progress depending on school practices, for example, since the school, conceived as an institution, contemplates only some situated skills (KLEIMAN, 1995; SIGNORINI, 1995; STREET, 1984, among others).

By focusing on their practices of reading and writing, we encounter a very complex multicultural environment: different reading and writing experiences determined by different institutions, each with its own specific experiences, expectations and objectives. For the recognition of these experiences' specificities, one activity that we developed in our research was the mapping of literacy practices of the teachers in formation in Rio Grande do Norte. This mapping represents an attempt to understand who these teachers are and what literacy worlds they are involved in.

In order to sequence the discussion here promoted, I begin the section that seeks to reflect on the academic literacy and some elements that make up this specific world.

### 3 THE NON-NEUTRALITY OF THE ACADEMIC LITERACY

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the United States, and in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the United Kingdom, actions promoted by the respective governments led to increased access to universities and to the growth of academic communities, and these would be composed of students from the most diverse backgrounds. The linguistic and sociocultural diversities were quite pronounced and showed great heterogeneity in these communities. As a result, some readaptation in the teaching of writing has become necessary.

In the United States, the pedagogical movement Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) gained power by advocating the inclusion of writing in the disciplines that made up university curricula. In the United Kingdom, difficulty and insufficiency with regard to the written language of students entering higher education generated the belief that, in order to solve the problem, lessons should be taught with the greater purpose of identifying and effectively working on the linguistic-textual issues (LEA; STREET, 1998).

As I argued earlier in this text, scientific language requires more scholarly forms in comparison to the everyday language, which is less formal, especially in writing. Much of this need concerns an aesthetic that is supposed to exist in a medium of knowledge production and systematization. The education scenario in Brazil, which has a history of linguistic development of basic education students based on the autonomous model of literacy, is undergoing a work process in order to reverse the difficulties that these students present when they enter university and need to use it more formalized, but we know that it is an extensive, complex process whose results can be successfully and adequately analyzed over the next few years.

Since the situated aspect of the text is recognized, it is evident that the university student has involvement with events of literacy, since these represent the contact, properly said, of the student with texts referring to his area of study, aiming at the appropriation of specific elements that make up the academic sphere and, consequently, the language characteristic of this world of literacy. It is about belonging and identity, factors through which, exclusively, the texts read and produced by the student will have meaning.

The domain of technical language is an important part of the scientist's learning [...] no one can be a chemist, a physicist or a biologist without mastering the jargon of his area ... More than for ordinary discourses or those of the human sciences, for the exact sciences the postulation of Pêcheux and Fuchs (1975) that the meaning of words and statements depends on the discourse to which they belong have value. To repeat, it is in these discourses, and as a consequence of a long and historical work, that such words and such statements have a univocal reading, and not in Portuguese, English, etc. From the point of view of the scientist's training, it seems evident that it implies a process of subjectivation that produces as effect a subjectivism process to the rules of the discourse of an institutional group [...] (POSSENTI, 1997, p. 20).

Academic literacy, the central theme of this article, refers to the ability to read, write, speak and act in the molds that characterize this context in particular, without disregarding, however, the influence of social, cultural and ideological experiences about the process of academic writing.

Concerning academic writing, Lea and Street (1998) present three approaches that deal with it: the model of skill studies, the model of academic socialization, and the model of academic literacy.

The first model comprises literacy as the cognitive skills of each individual in the group that constitutes the academy and that the students need to acquire to get their insertion in it. The highlight of this model is the fact that, once acquired these skills, the student would use them in a similar way in other contexts of writing.

On the model of academic socialization, the insertion in the academy culture is intermediated by the teacher, who is responsible, therefore, for the process of appropriation of the mentioned competences by the students, through the disciplines that minister or other literacy events.

The third approach focuses on the dimension of literacies that occur in the university, in a broader conception, which guarantee the multiplicity of practices in this sphere and the consequent and new way of organizing the knowledge to which the student is exposed. It is in this approach that the social bias to which I have been referring is better perceived, since the individual trajectories are determinant for the process of appropriation of the academic community elements, that are not restricted to writing, only, but to a whole roll on what the relations of power in that environment are, the recognition of the most valued discourses and the social identities built and maintained there. The interposition of oral and written practices becomes an essential element for the effectiveness of the social practices of the subject(s) contextualized by the academy.

Social and literary practices, which should not be confused or dissociated, are responsible for the veridictory aspect of a proposition, and insofar as they are instrumentalized by the academy formal elements, they acquire the character of scientificity, by means of writing. With this hook, I proceed to the next section, which will deal with the truth regime that engenders academic production, in order to situate how truth can be and is represented by the subject of knowledge.

#### 4 THE REGIME OF TRUTH

Discussing on truth, Foucault's major concern is not centered on the determination of what truth is or is not, but in the ways of its legitimation in society, that is, in the ways in which society interprets and determines what is true and what is false. Each society uses elements that characterize it for this determination, so that what is taken for true by one social composition may not be taken in the same way by another.

The exemption of political and economic interests in a scientific discourse should also not be seen as pure. Foucault (2004, p.8) infers that "[...] truth is circularly linked to systems of power, that produce and support it, and to effects of power that it induces and reproduces". The so-called truth games, that constitute the course by which the reader is guided and led to a certain understanding of a fact, are a very delicate set of rules that organize a network of coercive practices and institutions within which there are subjects who agree on what may or may not be classified as true.

It is in this network of practices that scientific discourse appears and is socially validated. In this position, there is an absurdly large dimension and an immeasurable importance is credited to the knowledge producers and to the universities, since they are the means of producing truths, although one can not forget that these means are developed into games that make it possible to constitute both objects of knowledge and processes of subjectivation of individuals (FOUCAULT, 2004).

The regime of truth on which Foucault argues, would not be solely ideological because the development of capitalism is concretized by means of scientific statements and consequent changes in the formation of statements which are taken for granted. We need to see what effects are produced within the discourses, and to sequence a historicity he calls bellicose, precisely because it is built under power relations and recognizing that "[...] what makes power to be maintained and accepted is simply that it weighs not only as a force that says no, but actually permeates, produces things, induces pleasure, constitutes knowledge, produces discourse" (FOUCAULT, 2004, p. 8).

The history of the subject of knowledge is the determinant of the truth regime. As it can be seen, Foucault has, on this theme, a less Marxist and less naturalistic perspective than the academic-scientific writing usually admits. Ordinarily, scientific discourse insists that a studied data, inherently inscribed in nature, is imprinted on the subject of knowledge, nurturing the notion of scientificity and, in the same direction, the notion of truth.

While it is admitted that every truth has a history, its emergence to the status of truth must be questioned by its historicity from a specific context of social practices of which domains of knowledge are components. The Foucaultian postulate focuses on the decentralization of the subject as the center of knowledge, since this subject of knowledge is, in fact, subject of representation, and through him the status of truth emerges.

Thus, Foucault and, later, Candiotti postulate in favor of two histories of the truth. For the consecrated thinker, there is an internal history, which refers to the principles that produce truth within the history of science, and, secondly, an external history, which encompasses the various other places where truth is formed, this relation existing between man and truth; this second history is able to define the specific forms of subjectivities and knowledge. For Candiotti (2007, p.2), it is pertinent to distinguish between a history of the truth of what *is* and a history of the truth of what *happens*.

There is the possibility of two histories of the truth: one of the manifestation of what is: apophantic-truth, discovery-truth, abstract-truth, constant, demonstrated and objective that makes use of mediation instruments; another, of what happens, of the production techniques, of reception through rituals and refusals, effect of games of truth that occur in concrete practices.

It is pertinent, therefore, to point that the production of knowledge, backed by the formal scientific discourse, does not occur only within the sciences. If this were taken, it would mean that all forms of contact with other non-scientific texts, in their essence, and others in a dialogical relationship did not contribute to the subject's own formation. Knowledge cannot be strictly bound up with science. It only has formality and strictness in what it proposes. Scientificity can integrate discursive practices, even those that are not clearly scientific, but they do not constitute them in their entirety.

Archaeological territories may pass through 'literary' or 'philosophical' texts as well as scientific texts. Knowledge is not invested only in demonstrations, it can also be in fictions, reflections, narratives, institutional regulations, political decisions [...]. Discursive practice does not coincide with the scientific elaboration to which it can give rise; the knowledge it forms is neither the rigorous outline nor the daily by-product of a constituted science. The sciences – it does not matter at the moment the difference between the discourses that have a presumption or a statute of scientificity and those that do not really present their formal criteria – appear in the element of a discursive formation and having knowledge as a background. (FOUCAULT, 1969, p.222)

In this bias, it is evident the interference (although it does not seem to me the most appropriate name) of the subjective identity, the ideology, the cultural load, the life experiences, and finally, the interests, as just mentioned, in any texts produced by an individual, including scientific texts. Coracini (1991, 148) recognized that “[...] any text results from the intertwining of a series of other texts, from other authors, other individuals, different ideological groups, and different discourses”, and this production is governed by a historicity of things and subjects that deal with them.

This profitable panorama, therefore, conditions the imaginary on the regime of truth that is present in the practices of academic literacy and scientific production, usually characterized as the universal knowledge. The proposal made in this text draws attention, finally, to the necessary criticality in dealing with scientific texts, in order not to ignore the existence of contexts that influence their production, and of course reduce the neutrality advocated for the genre.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Knowledge, the central object of academic writing, is certainly the theme on which I anchor to discuss its means of dissemination. Costa (2014) suggests that we begin to develop an increasingly critical view of the knowledge conception that we have defended in the current Brazilian sociopolitical context, seeking to ascertain to what extent it is built or imposed within the university. In the first

instance, it is expensive to recognize the ideologies that underlie today's academic literacy practices, since they seem to have been widely taken as absolute truths. Of course, the second action would be to make such ideologies explicit to students, and when and if necessary, put the constructed truths in check.

Similar to this position, it is possible to see a tendency easy to perceive in everyday conversations with people who go to a medical doctor appointment, for example. The culture of medical consultation seems to have undergone a great change in the way the population deals with it. Not many decades ago, according to reports that can certainly be obtained from over-sixty-year-old people today, the opinion of a single physician about a given health situation was enough, since it was taken for granted, and the possible treatment had a start without that opinion being questioned. At present, the search for distinct medical opinions is emphatic, aiming at a confirmation about the patient's real state of health, that is, to the confirmation of the represented truth.

This same tendency is what seems still very tenuous to the university and the culture of academic writing, even though we have, not from today, instruments for a rupture of paradigms and a favorable scenario for this to occur.

With the reflection proposed here, although it is brief, I gather concepts of Applied Linguistics, especially when dealing with the question of the literacy and academic literacy conceptions, with a more philosophical characteristic accessed by scientific discourse as a representation of the truth, and I draw attention to the need for denaturalization of the scientific discourse and for its most superficial starting point, the academic writing, to which, once, would be the definitive status of truth.

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