

Elements of discourse semantics for dealing with literature in childhood and adolescence

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Abstract

Working with literature with children and adolescents demands from the teacher procedures of transposition of meaning to make the text more appreciable and intelligible to its audience. In order to discuss this topic, the teachings of the semiotics of discourse are summoned, which finds its main exponent in Greimas, especially with regard to the topic of discursive semantics. From a methodological point of view, the hypothetical-deductive method and content analysis procedure, described by Lakatos and Gil, were adopted. In this article, the concept of isotopy is proposed as a guide to this process and as a theoretical aid to think about the didactic practice of reading teachers and mediators. Thus, the activity of these professionals must pay attention to the thematic and figurative paths they undertake when explaining the meanings of the texts-objects of their practice.

Keywords: Literature. Discursive semantics. Transposition of meaning. Isotopy.

Elementos de semântica discursiva para o trato da literatura na infância e na adolescência

Resumo

O trabalho com a literatura com crianças e adolescente demanda do professor procedimentos de transposição do sentido para fazer o texto mais apreciável e inteligível a seu público. A fim de discorrer sobre esse tema, convocam-se os ensinamentos da semiótica do discurso, que encontra em Greimas seu principal expoente, sobretudo no que concerne ao tópico da semântica discursiva. Do ponto de vista metodológico, adotou-se o método hipotético-dedutivo e procedimento de análise do conteúdo, descrito por Lakatos e Gil. Propõe-se, neste artigo, o conceito de isotopia como um balizador desse processo e como auxiliar teórico para pensar a prática didática de professores e mediadores leitura. Desse modo, a atividade desses profissionais deve se atentar para os percursos temáticos e figurativos que empreendem ao explicar os sentidos dos textos-objetos de sua prática.

Palavras-chave: Literatura. Semântica discursiva. Transposição do sentido. Isotopia.



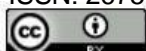
1 Introduction

The treatment of literature in childhood and adolescence imposes procedures that intend to make the text more appreciable and intelligible to the target audience. Among them, it is possible to observe a kind of translation, a transposition of the original meanings of the text into another text that is intended to be accessible to children or adolescents. According to a general impression of this process, in addition to extralinguistic factors, their degree of linguistic development, their sociocultural repertoires, the subjects conveyed by the text, and its suitability for the age group are considered. Oliva, Ponce, and Jurado (2021), draw attention to the Easy Reading (LF) movement, which originated in the 1970s, according to which it is necessary to simplify the language of the texts worked on in the classroom. In other words, this means transposing the content of a source text to a target text under a new expression.

This brief contextualization shows the conditions under which such translation takes place, but does not situate procedures that regulate it. Thus, the practice seems to lack control and theoretically oriented devices that allow, from a limited number of premises, to predict an almost infinite set of occurrences.

Far from closing the discussion, we resume Hjelmslev (2013) when he says that there is no universal formalization or systematization of objects, but there is even a universal principle of formalization. It is important to clarify that this is not a universal that applies to all texts and objects of man, to all times and cultures, but it is rather a principle that is non-contradictory in its premises, exhaustive as to the objects it can deal with and as simple as it is about the categories with which it operates the analyses of objects.

Based on this assumption, it is possible to approach the problem of literary translation in childhood from an immanent point of view that places the text and the articulation of language in a privileged position. In this way, it inquires into the textualization procedures that transform mysterious literature into a poetic delight, which





transport the student from the stage of strangeness of literary expression to its contemplation, from the unknown to the intelligible.

Therefore, the aim is to describe, via discourse semiotics, the transposition of meaning between texts with a view to the didactic effect of such an operation. In addition, we intend to present a way to implement theoretical and methodological elements of discourse semiotics in the didactic practice of elementary school literature teachers and reading mediators.

It is hypothesized that such a process occurs from the construction of a text that aims to explain and translate another text, which requires a conversion of figures from a source text to other figures in a target text. It would be like changing "henceforth" to "in the future", "so much" to "enough". Extending the reach of this proposition even further, we can explain the attempts - and we believe they have been successful - to translate authors like Machado de Assis into a language that is up-to-date and appropriate for children and teenagers. The examples are many: the comic book version of "Dom Casmurro" by Machado de Assis, published by Principisis in 2019; "The Capital for children" by Liliana Fortuny (2018), the children's adaptation of "The Odyssey" in "The Adventures of Odysseus" by Hugh Lupton (2008). By this same principle of translation, it is also possible to think about the practice of teachers and reading mediators in order to present another work proposal that is theoretically and methodologically oriented and founded on the functioning of language and on the articulation between expression and content.

2 Methodology

Given the theoretical nature of the object studied here, that is, the transposition of meaning, the hypothetical-deductive method was adopted, which, according to Marconi and Lakatos (2001), is characterized by its realization in three steps: (1) the assumption of a **problem** generated in the conflict between existing expectations and theory; (2) the elaboration of a solution in a **conjecture** and the deduction of actionable consequences





testing; (3) attempts to **distortion** that test propositions through observation of experimentation.

We then raise the problem of didactic procedures, from a textual point of view, that aim to make literary texts more accessible and appreciable for children and adolescents. We bet that these procedures carry out a transposition of meaning and establish an isotopy between the text to be commented on and the text commented on. To test this hypothesis, a kind of deductive calculation is proposed: from the premises and concepts presented, new propositions are deduced. The way to falsify them is in their coherence with the premises from which they start.

Based on these propositions, a possibility of working with the literary text will be presented, which aims at a translation of its meanings by means of a text that describes it and expands its meaning.

For the writing of the article, we adopted a research, in the terms of Gil (1999), **explanatory**, insofar as it wants to explain the phenomenon of the transposition of meaning in the cited context; **qualitative**, since it intends to outline a generalizing view of the phenomenon. The research also presents a bibliographical character, according to Marconi and Lakatos (2001), since it makes use of the state of the art of the French semiotic tradition on the themes of transposition of meaning and discursive semantics. As a technique for data analysis, the research was built on content analysis, according to Gil (1999), so that the texts cited here were read and interpreted to enrich the state of the art of semiotic theory and to provide a contribution to the practices of teaching reading.

As an illustration, we used an excerpt from the novel *O Guarani*, by José de Alencar, which serves as an example for the operation of the categories presented here in discourse analysis.

3 Results and Discussion

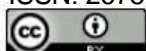
In this section, it is essential, before discussing the concepts that underlie our reflection, to distinguish the use of the adjuncts "infant" and "in childhood". – and the





same logic, by implication, must also apply to the adjunct "in adolescence". A brief analysis of the phrasal structure allows us to establish two sets when put in parallel. On the one hand, there is talk of children's literature, children's space, children's clothing, so that the adjective used indicates that these objects were thought of, created, and articulated to meet the needs of children. On the other hand, the use of "in childhood" presumes a concession: objects that are originally non-children's participate in activities in childhood or adolescence. This is the case, for example, with the proposition of courses such as "English in childhood" - and the use of the adjective, in the case of "English for children", would make it sound like an assessment of someone's ability to speak English. Therefore, when discussing literature in childhood and adolescence, we consider a wide range of texts and practices, including didactic and pedagogical practices, that aim to introduce the literary text in these phases of an individual's life, which indicates a wider range than that of children's literature, so that it is encompassed by the former.

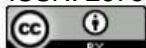
Such a distinction is further supported when an appropriateness is recognized. Fernandes (2013) points out that there are literary productions designed and produced according to a given age group. In order to better illustrate this fact, the author cites "The Fables" (1668), by La Fontaine; the "Tales of Mother Goose" (1691/1697), by Charles Perrault; and "Telemachus" (1699) by Fénelon", in addition to works in the contemporary Brazilian publishing market, such as "The Drawing Teacher and Other Stories", by Marcelo Coelho (1995); "A teacher who is very crazy" by Ziraldo Alves Pinto (1995); "The godmother's house" by Lygia Bojunga Nunes (1978); "The 8th grade C" by Odette de Barros Mott (1976); "For you I tell" by Moacyr Scliar (1990). These works exemplify what is called, according to the author, children's literature, created to serve children and adolescents. It is a topic of literary production that seeks to distinguish such literature from the so-called non-children's literature. It is possible, then, to establish the following parallel: while children's literature, in the terms presented here, is already adequate to the public it is aimed at, literature that is not aimed at children is not, which demands procedures that make it appreciable and intelligible to the same public. In this way,





teachers and reading mediators seek to "translate" the texts for children and adolescents - as they say in popular parlance. This translation, however, can be thought of in terms of a transposition of meaning, as Greimas (1973) presents us. According to the author, it is only possible to talk about meaning through its transposition into a new language, in other words, into a metalanguage. The same principle can be observed in teaching practices. Now, it is when the teacher, faced with confused and apathetic students, seeks in metaphors, for example, a way to translate the contents of his class. It is the classic comparison between literature, journeys, and trips, as if proposing that, through literature, the reader is able to get to know unknown places or travel through time. The teacher effectively creates a language to clarify another language, produces a text that aims to explain another text, explaining misunderstood terms and analyzing its structures in order to turn the text under discussion into an understandable text.

The example comes to illustrate the principle of transposition of meaning, dear to Greimas (1975, 1973). Such procedure establishes, according to the author, a starting point, the language-object, for which the analysis stabilizes a text-object, and an ending point, the metalanguage, for which a metatext is built - for lack of a better designation. The language-object is what the analysis leans toward, and the metalanguage arises deductively from it. A relationship of dependence by presupposition is then established: while the object-language is a presuppositional, the metalanguage is its logical presupposition. By the same principle, the analysis of a text-object deductively presupposes a metatext that describes it. It would not be unwise to extend this principle to understand the activity of signification in teacher-student interaction, especially when it comes to the teaching of reading. It is the case of observing a teacher who wants to work with a so-called difficult author, such as Clarisse Lispector, for eighth grade children. This hypothetical teacher will provide glossaries, comments, references and metaphors to the students, so that the hermetic expression - as Lispector was said to be - gradually opens up to the reader and reveals its message. Here is the metatext that describes the text-object, and, when put into relation, it is possible to speak of the meaning of the text.

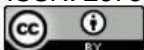




It is not difficult to imagine that this procedure can be done instinctively, and teachers and reading mediators do it with a certain naturalness without being equipped with such theoretical reflection. However, this apparent naturalness does not exclude the possibility that the transposition may occur according to a theoretical and methodological orientation.

In this regard, discourse semiotics is projected as a possible orientation for the transposition of meaning characterized by the immanent point of view in dealing with language and by the interest in the processes of signification, as summarized by Fiorin (2016, 2014). Since the article genre imposes limitations, the discussion will focus on discourse semantics. Moreover, the delimitation is justified by the fact that part of the transposition discussed here manipulates discourse structures of semantic rather than syntactic order.

According to Greimas and Coutés (2016), discourse semantics responds to the component that coats the actorial, temporal, and spatial structures of discourse. It is visualized, for example, that fairy tales bring in common an actant-object targeted by an actant-subject. In this case, discourse semantics is responsible for covering the object as "Sleeping Beauty", "Snow White", "Cinderella", while the subject is covered by "Prince Charming". Although these stories have a recurrence in their narrative structure, it is the discursive semantics that gives them their identity - and that is what makes readers identify with one princess to the exclusion of other princesses. In discourse semiotics, this coating of more abstract discourse structures with structures that are intended to be more concrete is called figurativization, and the effect generated by it is figurativity, which is a kind of spontaneous suggestion of "resemblance, representation, the imitation of the world by the arrangement of forms on a surface" (BERTRAND, 2000, p. 154). Thinking in minimal units, figures have the capacity to "produce and partially restore meanings analogous to those of our most concrete perceptual experiences" (idem). It is through figurativity that it is possible to "see", through the word, the characters, their physical features, and the scenarios of the stories told.





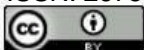
The perceptual effect is not due to the isolated occurrence of these figures. The perceptive effect they generate is due to their reiteration along the discursive chain, which requires some feature that gives them cohesion. To illustrate this, we analyze an excerpt from "The Guarani":

There, the Paquequer launches itself quickly on its bed, and crosses the forests like the tapir, foaming, leaving the fur sparse on the rocky points, and filling the solitude with the thunder of its career. Suddenly, he lacks space, the land flees him; the superb river retreats for a moment to concentrate its forces, and precipitates itself with a single throw, like a tiger on its prey. (ALENCAR, 1996 [1857], p.3 - author's emphasis)

One can notice, at a first reading, the mixture of figures such as the river, the forest, the fauna, the sounds, and that can be gathered under the theme of nature - or as the chapter title itself indicates, "the scenery". Themes, for discourse semantics, confer meaning and value to the figures, and thematization is the process by which one endows "a figurative sequence with more abstract meanings whose function is to ground its elements and unite them, to indicate an orientation and a purpose, or to insert them into a field of cognitive or passionate values" (BERTRAND, 2000, p. 213). In this way, we can see how Alencar's text manages at the same time to make the reader know the Paquequer River in its extension, when he says that it crosses forests, and imprints its sorbe, a sensation. This is not just saying that it is a vast river, it is making semantic investments that dimension it from the point of view of the intelligible and make the reader believe in the sensations it causes, from the point of view of the sensitive.

In this way, a relationship is established between the thematic isotopia and its figurative support, which, in turn, is also constituted in the form of an isotopia. Bertrand establishes two components for the semantics of discourse, the figurative and the thematic:

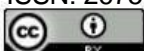
The figurative must be assumed by a theme [...] the description of figurative isotopias is most often aimed at establishing the thematic isotopy that underlies it, if the latter is not contextualized. This second-level signification can manifest itself in an extremely varied way. It can, of course, be explicitly named by means of an abstract term, for example, which will condense the set of figurative sequences" (idem)





In analyzing the concept of isotopy, one realizes that it is a cohesive element - to use school language - capable of maintaining coherence in textualization processes, including the didactic translation that teachers perform in an attempt to introduce literature to their students. First, we take the example in which the teacher, faced with an archaic Portuguese word, provides the student with a synonym that is contemporary to him. It is the relationship that is proposed between "assaz", as found in Machado de Assis, and "bastante", observable in any school essay. The student may not know what the first word means, but by indicating its synonym, bastante assumes the position of metalanguage and describes the unknown word. From the semantic-discursive point of view, what occurs is the establishment of a thematic isotopy that unites the sequence assaz and bastante, so that, if the words are distant in time, they come together in the common thematic feature: sufficiency.

Extending the idea that isotopy is an element of semantic cohesion between figures, it is possible to say that it is capable of establishing cohesion between texts and between distinct semiotic sets. The hypothetical teacher wants to present, through images, the text of "The Guarani", especially the passage that presents the Paquequer river, and selects a photo gallery. Thus, two texts are established whose semiotics differ from each other. For the first, there is the exclusive articulation of verbal language; for the second, there is only visual language. Having found the difference, we must now recognize their identity. As we have seen, a figurative isotopia is developed throughout the excerpt taken from the novel by Alencar, which reinforces the physical features of the river and the scenery it runs through, while, from the thematic point of view, the isotopia can be summarized under the term a nature that, through the text, makes itself known and felt. In order to establish a cohesion between text and images, the hypothetical teacher looks for those that develop the same isotopic paths or those whose semantic investments, figurativization and thematization, resemble those of the text under analysis. Once the images are selected, an imagetic text is stabilized in which the thematic isotopia of nature is joined to the figurative sequence: trees, riverbed, riverbanks, and the image



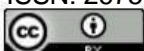


of the tapir. In this way, the teacher proposes an intersemiotic activity for the student, oriented so that the visual text serves as a descriptive metatext for the verbal text.

Regarding this activity, it does not escape us that such a relationship can effectively expand the meaning. The selected images were not necessarily created to represent the Paquequer River; they, in their production, present their own figurative and thematic investments. For example, these images will bring details about colors and luminosity that are proper of the visual text - and that are often implicit in the reading of the verbal text. The contact, in the classroom, between the verbal text and the imagetic text produces another text, which is not a third text, according to a sequence, but a text that synthesizes the other two and puts them in function. The text-object presupposes a metatext that gives it meaning, while the metatext exists as a function of the description of the text-object. This textual dynamic makes the isotopic sets of the metatext interfere with the isotopic sets of the text-object. As for the inverse path, some considerations must be made. We resume the case in which the visual text describes the verbal text. In order to proceed according to how the former describes the latter, it is necessary to understand text-object and metatext as functions, positions to be occupied according to the decision of who undertakes the analysis: sometimes the teacher can make the verbal text describe the pictorial text, sometimes he makes the pictorial text descriptor of the verbal text. This means that it is not the case of the metatext becoming described, but it is the case of saying which text fulfills this role in real to another text.

In this way, a semantic path is built simultaneously, beyond isotopic similarities, by the differences that each text retains within itself. This hierarchically superior text avails itself of the details of images not mentioned by the verbal text and of sensitive impressions, translated into words and that escape the image.

It is by this model that the relationship between adapted texts and their original forms is described. We owe to isotopy the maintenance of identity between, for example, the novel *Dom Casmurro*, by Machado de Assis, and its translations into multimodal texts, such as comics and cinema. Therefore, the observance of the investments semantic of figurativization and thematization allows the establishment of identities and





differences between texts, which generates a figurative-thematic path capable of explaining meanings and amplifying the significance.

4 Final considerations

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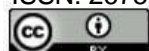
The work proposal presented here stems from the desire to present the literary text in its integral form in childhood and adolescence - with due consideration for the age group and curriculum demands. This article even aims to deconstruct the idea that literature is closed in its language and that only with many years of reading and consulting dictionaries is it possible to work with Machado de Assis, an author considered difficult, in primary 2, for example.

This tired idea seems to persist among teachers, but the elaboration of a translation device, of the transposition of meaning, stands up to such thinking. Now, the cultural baggage of the students is not ignored, nor the adequacy of the texts to the age group they work with. However, it is necessary to fight the idea that only the highly erudite read Machado de Assis - and understand him -. This idea suffocates the work with reading, pruning the possibilities for teachers to explore the literary text.

By understanding that, between texts, it is possible to establish a relationship between descriptor and described, between a text that speaks of another text, he can make use of the students' repertoires, of images, of gestures that aim to explain what he asks to be explained.

With the concept of isotopy and the procedures of figurativization and thematization, the semantic paths that the teacher can manipulate in favor of constructing a text that translates a literary work into the context of childhood and adolescence become clear. This is what, in parts, the LF movement aims at, and our contribution comes to formalize this "simplification of language" according to a theoretical and methodological orientation.

In this process of transposition of meaning via figurativity, the teacher can show the coincidences between the languages worked on and between the contents linked by





the texts, and the analysis also makes use of their idiosyncrasies, which expand the meaning of the source text for the construction of a broader text, which mobilizes other contents and other semiotics in a manner consistent with the proposed isotopic path. This can mean two gains: for the teacher, it means the possibility of working on different texts without the ghost of difficulty and supposed erudition; for the student, it means operating in different languages in the understanding of the text, in a global proposal of knowledge.

Therefore, for us, isotopia and the transposition of meaning are the guiding principles of the textual and didactic resources available to the teacher and reading mediator when dealing with the literary text aimed at children and adolescents. In view of the proposed discussion, it is appropriate that the didactic reflections incorporate elements of discourse semiotics, since the practice of teaching is also a language practice. In this way, it is necessary to understand how language works so that the didactic proposals for the teaching of reading are more precise as to how to deal with texts.

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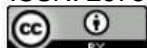
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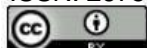
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