

**Academic/Scientific Literacy and Legitimate Peripheral Participation:
An Ethnographic Study of Legal Practice Communities / *Letramento
acadêmico/científico e participação periférica legítima: estudo
etnográfico em comunidades de prática jurídica***

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the practices of academic/scientific literacy in specific contexts, in which the focus is on the legitimate peripheral participation of learners in concrete practices of specialists in an office of legal practice in a Law School. At the theoretical level, from a multidisciplinary perspective, we associate several theories, such as the Socio-Cultural theory, regarding the social activity in the learning of a language and how such theory helps in the formation of concepts. We relate it to the construct of the language sociological perspective, from Bakhtin, on the heterogeneous, dialogical and intertextual aspect of the utterances. The research seeks to understand the process of knowledge construction in legal disciplinary contexts, presenting a clipping of data production from an interview with students as well as the legal laboratory coordinators. We present the background of text production and the perception of these participants regarding this social practice.

KEYWORDS: Academic Literacy; Legitimate Peripheral Participation; Legal Practice Communities

RESUMO

Este estudo apresenta uma reflexão acerca das práticas de letramento acadêmico/científico em contextos específicos, delimitando o escopo, em particular, na participação periférica legítima de aprendizes nas práticas concretas de especialistas em um escritório de prática jurídica de um curso de Direito. No âmbito teórico, de perspectiva multidisciplinar, associamos, dentre outras, a Teoria Sócio-Cultural, no tocante à atividade social na aprendizagem da linguagem e desta na formação de conceitos, relacionando-a ao construto da perspectiva sociológica da linguagem, de cunho bakhtiniano, sobre o aspecto heterogêneo, dialógico e intertextual dos enunciados. A pesquisa busca compreender o processo de construção do conhecimento no contexto disciplinar do âmbito jurídico, expondo um recorte da geração de dados a partir de uma entrevista com discentes e com a coordenação do laboratório delimitado. Explicitamos a situação de produção de textos do entorno e a percepção desses participantes em relação a essa prática social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Letramento acadêmico; Participação periférica legítima; Comunidades de prática jurídica*

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Introduction

This paper aims at investigating academic/scientific literacy¹ in specific contexts. Our study focused, in particular, on the legitimate peripheral participation of the core of an office of legal practice². The intertwining between discursive practices was investigated from a multidisciplinary setting. Discursive practices, according to the Critical Discourse Analysis (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992), are understood as the production, distribution, and consumption of texts, as well as social activities relevant to different specific contexts.

The data came from the study of discursive actions of scientific literacy, in which the participation of learners in concrete practices of experts in a specific community (in this case, members of an office of Legal Practice of a Law degree), allowed the understanding of how the appropriation of academic/scientific literacy in this specific field of knowledge took place.

Our choice is justified because we sought to understand, firstly, the literacy events; secondly, the discourses that make literacy relevant to a specific community of practice; finally, the configuration of the linguistic system that gives materiality to the texts produced, distributed, and consumed within the specific context of knowledge production.

Thus, this article is presented in three moments: the first moment discusses the relationship between verbal interaction and the communities of academic practice; the second explores theoretical constructs focused on these practices in the scientific sphere; in the third, we present the specific context of this research, the methodology

¹ In this article, “academic literacy” and “scientific literacy” are considered synonyms, since, according to Motta-Roth (2000), Andrade (2003) and Chassot (2003), the academic context of research laboratories and teaching of any area of the university needs to be understood as the space of production of knowledge (science) by teachers and undergraduate and graduate students. In some theoretical constructs, the terms “*literacia acadêmica*” and “scientific alphabetization” are also used instead of scientific or academic literacy.

² These correspond to initial studies that are linked to the research project *Academic/ scientific literacy and legitimate peripheral participation in communities of knowledge production* (Project # 035474/2013, registered at the Office of Projects - GAP/UFSM and approved by the Ethics Committee Research - CEP/UFSM, Report # 434033/2013), registered in the research line “Language in the Social Context” of the UFSM Graduate Program in Literature, associated to GRPesq/CNPq “Language as social practice,” having as the leader Prof. PhD Désirée Motta-Roth, from Federal University of Santa Maria, and Coordinator of LABLER-Laboratory of Research and Teaching Reading and Writing. The focus of the research is on various and multimodal discourse genres.

and the generation of initial data, resulting from the analysis of literacy practices via interview in a community of learners of legal practices.

1 The Verbal Interaction and Communities of Academic Practice

The materialist conception of our origin shows that man is, at the same time, profoundly distinct from their ancestors and that humanization results from the transition to life in a society organized on the basis of work. This transition modifies man's nature and marks the beginning of a development subjected not to biological laws, but to the socio-historical laws (VOLOŠINOV, 1973³; VYGOSTKY, 1991)⁴.

Men change nature according to their needs. They manufacture objects, the means of production of these objects, from tools to complex machines. Thus, they also develop culture, for their knowledge of the surrounding world and of themselves grow, giving rise to science and art.

A new degree on the development of man's motor skills marks each advance on the development of work. The same process occurs in relation to knowledge appropriation, which depends on the results of cognitive activity from other generations. The skills and the specifically human traits are not transmitted by biological heredity, but are acquired throughout the course of life, through a process of appropriation of the culture created by earlier generations (LURIA; LEONTIEV; VIGOTSKI, 1977).

Communities of practice fall in this context. They are considered living organisms, created over time through the continuous pursuit of common goals by its members. According to Wenger (1998), it is the nature of the social being to be constantly engaged in the pursuit of goals, interacting with others in different contexts and, thus, learning: as time goes by, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our goals and the concomitant social relations. These practices are, therefore, the property of a type of community, *communities of practice* (WENGER, 1998).

³ VOLOŠINOV, V. N *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Transl. by Ladislav Matejka e I. R. Titunik. New York/London: Seminar Press, 1973.

⁴ References consulted by the author are at the end of the paper. The footnotes have the English versions consulted by the translator whenever possible.

Man, therefore, assimilate the skills created by social history. Thus, if isolated, he will not develop their psychic functions, since humanization occurs through contact with beings collectively organized. Man produces knowledge transforming nature through work, which are then passed on. A community of practice expands itself through its renewal, by forming new members, who will gradually learn how to have an effective participation in the activities of this social group (HANKS, 1991).

Indeed, verbal actions can be considered both mediators and part of the social fabric. Multiple and diverse motivations, intentions, paradigms, behaviors, concepts, theories, interact in them, which gives a new meaning to the image of self and others. When studying the processes that involve language, it is important to understand how the agents of interaction allow us to see the contextualizing marks of production, the social horizon, and the evaluative appreciation regarding the communicative act in which they participate.

From Bakhtin's perspective, it is in the flow of verbal interaction that the utterance becomes an ideological sign, which mutates and gains different meanings according to the context in which it is spoken. Thus, dialogue is revealed as the fabric of life through language, by the phenomenon of social interaction.

Thus, as knowledge is systematized, in constant dialectical interaction, men's ideas and experiences are spread discursively, materialized in concrete utterances. Every age and every social group has its own repertoire of forms of discourse; they function as a mirror that *reflects* and *refracts* the everyday life, and the *word* is the image of the space in which the fundamental values of a given society are explained and confronted (VOLOŠINOV, 1973)⁵.

The *other* is important not only in the drafting process of knowledge, but also in the constitution of the individual itself and their own ways of doing things, with mediation being one of the fundamental aspects for learning. The academy, for example, as a *community of practice* for knowledge production (WENGER, 1998), is created with a certain common intent, and engaged in ensuring the survival of its primary objective: collective learning (MOTTA-ROTH, 2013).

In the historical process, this collective learning produces practices that reiterate the initial objectives as well as the needs arising from social relations embedded in this

⁵ See footnote 3.

context. The expansion of a community of practice relates to the constant dynamism of the process, which renews itself in the formation of new social participants, who interact with the group and learn with their peers the activities carried out by them (HANKS, 1991).

In this perspective, social interaction is essential to learning effectiveness. Many communities of practice can be characterized by the empirically appropriation of knowledge, but a theoretical activity, such as those developed in academic courses, is also characterized as practice. This happens because the experienced members teach the practice they learned interactively, providing the perpetuation of the community. Therefore, *practice* can be defined as a set of agreed upon forms of social activities in a specific field of human action (MOTTA-ROTH, 2013).

For Fairclough (2012, p.94), “every practice is an articulation of diverse social elements within a relatively stable configuration, always including discourse.”⁶ In it, one will find activities, subjects and their social relations, instruments, objects, time and place, form of consciousness, values, and discourse. These elements that intertwine dialectically through their own methods, when shared in the group, provide a pattern that underlies and gives meaning to the actions of the participants in relation to the specific needs of each sphere of activity.

Each community mobilizes resources with various types of knowledge arising from the specifics of each area of knowledge. Therefore, by analogy, we may think that each subject or area of knowledge that makes up the universe of academic research and teaching in universities corresponds to a large community of practice, comprised of smaller units, organized in networks (MOTTA-ROTH, 2013).

The participation in a certain community of college practice presupposes the engagement in discursive actions that organize the interaction between professionals in the area, since this practice is formed by oral, written, and multimodal genres. Academic literacy, therefore, becomes a goal and a challenge for students committed to professional learning, which is characterized as a social practice.

⁶ Text in original: “Toda prática é uma articulação de diversos elementos sociais em uma configuração relativamente estável, sempre incluindo o discurso”.

2 Literacy Practices in Academic-Scientific Sphere

“Literacy practices,” according to Street (2012), represent an attempt to deal with the events and patterns of literacy activities in order to link them to something broader of cultural and social nature, bringing in concepts, social models related to the nature of the practice and the way it works, ethnographically building on their meanings. Indeed, in this research it was necessary to investigate not only the literacy itself, but also the context it was built upon, bringing it close to Bakhtin’s philosophical theory.

As for academic practices, it is necessary to analyze social relations and the academy itself. Accordingly, in a survey, one cannot predict what will give meaning to an event of literacy and what will link a set of literacy events to literacy practices: Literacy practices refer to this broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about doing reading and writing and performing them in cultural contexts (STREET, 2012).

It is understood that literacy practices are parameterized by social institutions and power relations. Therefore, all forms of literacy are ideological and cannot be neutral at all (BARTON, HAMILTON, 1998). It is this approach to literacy as a social practice that allows the construction of meanings about the variations in the uses and meanings of the context. Developing academic literacy as professional learning of an academic writer/reader “[...] offers challenges in any area [...], especially if we think we write to and with the other, anticipating, projecting our audience and the institutions in which the production, distribution and consumption of the text is inserted” (MOTTAROTH, 2013, p.138).⁷

This perspective resembles Vigotsky’s methodological principle, which is guided by the analysis of the development of human mental functions, their social and semiotically mediated origin, understanding education as a collective historical production of humanity, being a mediator of global social practice.

In Bakhtin's view, it is also in the interaction that the sign becomes the guiding element, since it derives from social structures filled with ideologies, whose universe of

⁷ Text in original: “[...] oferece desafios em qualquer área [...], especialmente se pensarmos que escrevemos para o outro e com o outro, antecipando, projetando nossa audiência e as instituições em que a produção, distribuição e consumo desse texto se inserem”.

creation is essentially of semiotic nature. If we understand sign as *word*, then it is all coated with a heteroglossic aura and loaded with an ideology that gives meaning to the discourse.

When it comes to language and learning, language skills develop in the process of interpersonal relations constituted in social practices. Language is experienced as texts produced and consumed in our surroundings, enabling us to experiment culture, i.e., the knowledge that was learned in the social interaction of a given linguistic community.

Therefore, a language system is developed when we experience the *text-in-situation* and culture is developed when we mobilize the knowledge of this system and the social practices of the community to interpret a text. In this approach, language can be considered a social semiotic system, since it is shared socially to give meaning, creating meanings and culture (MOTTA-ROTH, 2013). Language is learned so that one is able to participate in social life, mediated by the representational and constitutive relationship between text and context.

Viewed from this angle, it is considered that the student develops skills related to academic/scientific literacy through concrete activities mediated by experts in their community of practice, where the responsibilities related to linguistic production progress gradually, expanding along the way of *legitimate peripheral participation* of the learner (HANKS, 1991).

This *situated learning* establishes awareness and academic empowerment in students engaged in productively contributing to the *status quo* of the community of practice they belong to by reading and writing with a defined intentionality. It becomes a continuous education activity, gradually inserting the student in linguistic actions that will enable their gradual performance in professional contexts and activities.

Thus, academic/scientific literacy relates to the ability to understand and linguistically interpret the facts, events, or processes that can be observed in nature and society (CHASSOT, 2003). It is the action of language that allows one to understand how to think, act, and interact in contexts of production of all human knowledge in its various incarnations (SNOW, 1990).

In this sense, academic/scientific literacy consists of both the familiarity with basic scientific facts and concepts and the ability to use the complex set of elements

belonging to the cognitive processes inherent to the academic practice, linked to the reasoning required by the different spheres of knowledge (LEMKE, 2000).

Academic or scientific literacy, therefore, must be analyzed as a comprehensive representation, in which different elements interact. Not only are the skills of reading and writing texts of the scientific world privileged, but also the following dimensions:

- (1) the *knowledge* of science and technology products, of the symbolic systems that express and build upon it, of its procedures, producers and users (DURANT, 2005);
- (2) the *attitude* toward the material or mental experience, the openness to change of mind based on new evidence, the investigation without prejudice, the elaboration of a concept of cause and consequence, the habit of basing judgments on facts, and the ability to distinguish between fact and theory (MILLER, 1983);
- (3) the *understanding and production of texts and discourses* that project opinions on science and technology and the world in which one lives in (SANTOS, 2007);
- (4) the *ability* to make political choices that inevitably arise from the awareness of the science and technology impact in society (MILLER, 1983).

Learners who engage in academic/science literacy have the possibility of transiting effectively in language actions that permeate discourses of their expertise area. This ability allows them to participate as active subjects in debates related to scientific and technological innovations of their community of practice, under the political and social point of view, propitiating the construction of an academic, scientific literacy toward citizenship (MILLER, 1983).

3 Practice of Academic/Scientific Literacy through Discourse Genres in a Juridical Community of Practice: the Research Context, Methodology, and Data Generation.

Due to the fact that the investigation was carried out in an office of legal practice in a Law school, the research focuses on the learner's discursive actions in this environment, considered a field of concrete activities of specialists in a specific community. Our goal was to understand how the appropriation of academic/scientific literacy occurs and its relationship to the discursive experiences of knowledge production in that particular area.

It is necessary to clarify that the term “discourse,” in the singular form, refers to the text related to the interaction, the language in use, according to Fairclough’s *Critical Discourse Analysis* (1992), and to Bakhtin’s *Dialogic Discourse Analysis* (BRAIT, 2003). In this perspective, an instance of discourse is both: a text, a discursive practice, and a social practice. The term “discourses,” in the plural form, refers to the various ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice (MOTTA-ROTH, 2013). Thus, the discourses of Legal Science, the focus of this article, are contemporaneously dominant regarding the knowledge of that area of wisdom.

We, then, investigated the discursive practices of scientific literacy as well as the legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice of knowledge production (an Office of Legal Practice from a Law Course) taking in consideration: a) the literacy events; b) the discourses that make literacy relevant to each particular community of practice; and finally; c) the configuration of the linguistic system that gives materiality to the texts produced, distributed, and consumed in each specific context of knowledge production.

The term academic/scientific literacy in our study designates a process pertaining to the context of teaching and researching in the university, dealing with the learning of a way of thinking, acting and communicating in situations of production of scientific knowledge in specific areas. Therefore, the social context in which the office is inserted becomes an effective condition of social interaction, since it builds discourses in its processes of production, distribution and consumption of multimodal texts (MOTTA-ROTH, 2013).

Thus, this research corresponds to an ethnographic investigation, since it builds on a social practice problem as a significant and regulated form of action, presenting ways to carry out the analysis of a bounded reality and reflect on the character set of the chronotope research (PENNYCOOK, 1998). This is a procedural, theoretical, and empirical research, which relies on a method of dialectical approach to investigate the interplay of the academic literacy phenomenon, understanding it as constantly changing. From this angle, it is understood that the clash between social voices is an inherent condition to the changes taking place in the academia and society.

The proposed view, based on the *Dialectical Theory of Knowledge* (GASPARIN, 2007), assumes the following: the study of the social practice of the

subjects involved in the process to be studied; theorization of this social practice, seeking a theoretical support that reveals, describes and explains this reality; and the possible intervention in this reality through the knowledge gained in the process. With this in mind, we carried out a clip in the social microcosm studied, taking as chronotope, the second half of 2013 and a Higher Education Institution in the northwest of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

A multidisciplinary analysis was then carried out, as we used the following theories: Applied Linguistics, to provide the background for the reflection on the teaching and learning process related to the discursive capacities; the sociological view of language, based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CHOULIARAKI; FAIRCLOUGH, 1999), to support the study of genres which permeates the studied environment and the methodological analysis of the generated data; Social Rhetoric (SWALES, 1990; BAZERMAN, 2000), to understand the relationship between the development of academic/scientific literacy and participation in social practices in this specific context; Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory (2001) on the role of social activity in learning the language and its role on forming concepts; and the Dialogic Discourse Analysis (BRAIT, 2003), from Bakhtin's perspective, on the heterogeneous, dialogical and intertextual nature of utterances.

This article will present information gathered from an interview with members of the analyzed community of practice. The content of the interview focused on the context of production of literacy activities in order to understand how the participants of this legal culture and literacy events related to it see themselves, their own actions and those of their peers, among other cultural information. The emphasis, therefore, is on systems of activities, social relations, and literacy practices inherent in the process of knowledge construction within the delimited legal context.

From this perspective, it is known that the undergraduate Law courses should privilege, in their syllabus, internship of legal practice, according to article 7, Resolution CNE/CES No. 9/2004 (BRAZIL, 2004). The laboratory of practice in which the data generation was carried out is part of the Law School at Faculdades Integradas Machado de Assis, maintained by Machado de Assis Educational Foundation.

According to the Institutional Development Plan (IDP) and the Course Pedagogical Project (CPP)⁸, the objective of laboratory practices is to train qualified professionals to carry out activities related to the legal operators, hoping to enable them to take part in social processes, within the State and the Brazilian law system, being able to work, meeting the demands of citizenship as well as of those of the economic, scientific development.

According to information available at the Course official website⁹, the Center for Legal Practice - CLP comprises the actual legal services, simulated and associated legal practice, created by Resolution number 21/2013 and adopted by the Higher Management Board (HMB). The Legal Assistance Office (LAO) is among the activities offered by the HMB, rendering its services since July 2010, with nearly 3,000 requests.

The team is composed by four professors and specialized attorneys in the assistance areas. One of them is the coordinator of activities, who is assisted by a secretary and by university students, responsible for Real Legal Practice I and II, which is part of the CPP syllabus of the Law School. The legal services are offered to the community of Santa Rosa, RS. Some criteria for the legal assistance were set, due to its pedagogical character, such as an income of up to two and a half times the national minimum wage, and the assistance taking place in the Municipality.

The initial results of the research are presented in this article, with a diagnosis survey, from a written interview with the Coordinator of Legal Practice and Law students¹⁰ from FEMA.

30% of forty university students answered the following questions: In what situations do you use writing at LAO and how often? Which texts are produced by you at LAO, for what purpose and to whom? What are the main difficulties in the production of texts at LAO? To what extent can engaging in writing activities at LAO be important to your daily, academic, and professional life?

Our data allowed us to map the answers of the interview and organize them in tables and graphs, according to each question. Regarding the first question, the LPC Coordinator and, therefore, of the Legal Practice Office, stated that these situations

⁸ Available at: <http://www.fema.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/pdf_direito_ppc2012.pdf>. Access on: 10 mar. 2014.

⁹ Available at: <http://www.fema.com.br/?page_id=204>. Access on: 10 mar. 2014.

¹⁰ The Legal Practice Center (LPC) Coordinator answered the same questions that the students were asked, also in writing.

happen daily and throughout the internship period, in view of the constant occurrence of legal procedures, to which lawyers are requested to “express themselves (*speak*)” on the judicial reports. In addition, the interns are instructed to prepare a summary of the facts, when consulting with petitioners, for further research and considerations, which is also recorded on registration forms. Given the occurrence of hearings, the trainees perform the preparation/summary of important points about the case as well as notify clients to appear at the LAO to address the issue.

The interviewed students emphasize that the writing production at LAO occurs mostly in the early stages of the lawsuits, pleadings and other petitions in the course of processes. The frequency is constant during their stay in the office. Only 25% say that writing is used in all their daily office situations: during consultations (to write down each case and the data of people seen), in the written petitions (petitions, appeals, power of attorney, declarations), writing e-mails, writing down the internship attendance list, among others. This may show a behavior conditioning on the part of most students, as they perceive as written production only the more formal texts, marginalizing those of less legal status.

As to the second question (also related to what texts are produced), the Coordinator said that the trainees draw up the initial petitions, disputes, counterclaims, replicas, memorials, appeals, special and extraordinary appeals, requests for clarification, interlocutory appeal, reply to the charge, petitions during the proceedings, summaries, preparation of hearings, directed studies, case law analyses, research at the administrative level, notifications, among others.

Students, in turn, mention the petition as the most recurring type of text along with agreements, declarations, defenses, objections, protests, drafts, appeals, powers of attorney, disputes, court settlements, and requests. Only 16.66% add the registration forms as texts, which corroborate our analysis of the previous question.

As to the purpose of the texts produced, the Coordinator says they focused on professional learning, communication, writing exercise and legal technique to protect the interests of LAO’s clients and meeting deadlines. For the interns, the purpose is, in general, to make petitions and claims on the procedural acts on behalf of the constituent parts of the LAO processes, filing lawsuits, defending, challenging, and appealing. Only 25% emphasize that the main purpose of producing the requested texts was to ensure

the constitutional rights of the people who came looking for their services at LAO. The same number argues that the goal of the legal writing practice at LAO is directed to the aid of those who need free legal assistance.

This finding may show that the students' focus is more oriented toward what is highlighted as the main objective of the Legal Assistance Office, i.e., to provide contact with the court work by developing the practice of activities as a lawyer. The fact that the legal services are offered to a community considered needy, due to its pedagogical character, is not evidenced either in the Coordinator's or the majority of respondents' speech, which indicates the little emphasis on the pedagogical aspect as one of its function.

It is worth mentioning that none of trainees, differently from their Coordinator, mentioned the issue related to meeting the procedural deadlines, i.e., the periods of time fixed by the law, by the judge, or by the agreement of the parties to a dispute. These deadlines may be set, for instance, at the filing of the legal action and the defense, established by the Civil Procedure Code. In this case, there is a disregard for a key aspect of the production context of court work.

When asked who the interlocutors of the texts produced at the LAO are, the Coordinator mentioned that the trainees report to the Judiciary, to the administrative and public authorities, to the LAO itself (represented by professors-advisors), to clients, and to lawyers. None of the students mentioned their most experienced peers in this community of practice, their professors/advisors. Clients are described as interlocutors by 41% of the respondents. The vast majority, 66.6%, mentioned the members of the City's Judicial Branch, who have access to the lawsuits.

This may show the trainees' concern with the readers of a higher hierarchical level outside the LAO. It may also show the understanding by the trainee of the literacy event as more than an academic-scientific practice, as a real court work. In it, the learner does not play a secondary role, but he is a key player, as presupposed in the name of the Curriculum Component.

When asked to list the main difficulties found by the interns, the Coordinator described the incorrect and/or hasty interpretation of facts, the lack of prior and further reading, the lack of objectivity and synthesis when presenting the reasoning, and the lack of knowledge of the specific language required for the production of texts.

The trainees, on the other hand, mentioned that their greatest difficulties are especially issues related to grammar accuracy and mastering the forensic as well as Portuguese language. Students said Portuguese language is considered less privileged in terms of the specific study of the course and seen, according to them, essential to the Law practitioner. Only one of the students mentioned the fact that the initial ignorance of texts of legal area, such as petitions and appeals, is limiting in the process, but believes it is minimized by the intervention of a professor/advisor. Another student claims the lack of computers in the office as the biggest inhibitor of writing production practice, since there is only one computer for every two trainees, at the LAO.

We noticed here the biggest discrepancy between the Coordinator's and the students' perception. This was most likely due to the lack of experience on the part of the interns of the operations involved in the strategic processes of understanding and interpreting meanings as well as of the construction of meaning for the kind of texts produced at LAO which are essential for reading and producing text of forensic work.

As for the last question, (To what extent can engaging in writing activities at LAO be important to your daily, academic, and professional life), the Coordinator argues that it is of paramount importance, since he believes that the difficulty in writing far exceeds the individual and affects the social, the collective. In other words, one of the parts may lose a demand due to a technical failure of the lawyers, because their writing is the mechanism that presents his clients demands to the State/Judge.

According to the professor/advisor, it often happens that the lawyer may not be able to clearly "convey" to the judicial authority what his client is looking for with the lawsuit, making the rejection of the demand almost certain, and from this, the possibility of professional civil liability. Therefore, he claims that writing activities are essential to the intellectual development of trainees, because the technical deficiency may lead the future lawyer to lose the claim his client is pleading in court, leaving him, the lawyer, in an uncomfortable position and shunning him away from establishing a reputation in the legal Brazilian scene.

The trainees' answer to this question, in general, is in line with the Coordinator's, because they consider writing to be essential to the legal activity. They believe that the good professional will use it in their day-to-day work in order to also persuasively defend the ideas put forward in the pleadings. According to the

interviewees, the power of persuasion materialized by writing can often ensure the success of a lawsuit or, if badly drafted, its failure, ruining the lawyer's reputation. They also reiterate that *writing is learned by doing it*; therefore, practice is extremely important for the student and future lawyer.

We realized then that the LAO intends to carry out literacy practices as an attempt to make the professors/advisors insert their students in events as well as cultural and social patterns of forensic work. The most experienced peers seek to help build social concepts and models related to this field of activity, showing its operation and seeking to ethnographically produce their meanings and senses into the learners' experience.

However, these actions are not seized with the same degree of understanding by all students, resulting in discrepancies concerning what professors/advisors expect the students to learn and what is actually understood in the process. We also found that the genres seen as more relevant, which are parameterized by social institutions and power relations, are the ones considered as written production by most learners, marginalizing others that are also part of the procedural action.

This proves the ideological issue that permeates every social practice, any discourse (VOLOŠINOV, 1973)¹¹. In this sense, the perception of dialogue by the students is also an ideological issue. In their answers regarding the interlocutors of their texts, their concern about those who are part of a higher hierarchy outside the LAO is clear, in detriment of their clients, as well as their more experienced peers. Therefore, it is likely that the choices of language materialization turn towards this universe, discrediting what is considered by the legal world to be the main actor of the whole process, the lawyers' client.

However, the concern about the ability of verbal action by the respondents is unanimous, which demonstrates the importance of experiencing the text in its production situation, developing culture to mobilize the knowledge of the system and the social practices of the community to understand, interpret and produce an utterance. This means that the perception of the group social life is mediated by the representational and constitutive relationship between text and context.

¹¹ See footnote 3.

Conclusion

From the theoretical construct and the data from the interviews with members of the Legal Assistance Office - LAO belonging to the Higher Education Institution, we consider that our research, even with partial results, allows us to understand that academic/scientific literacy requires the development of skills related to semiotics in relation to reading and writing texts within the field of university activity. It is essential for the inclusion of the subject-participant in social practices of their academic community.

Our data show that learning based into concrete activities mediated by experts in a community of practice, in which the responsibilities in relation to linguistic production are gradually progressive and expand along the path of legitimate peripheral participation of the learner (HANKS, 1991), establishes awareness about empowerment resulting from this academic participation in students.

In this sense, we noticed that the participants in the community of practice recognize the importance of producing texts in the situation of legal labor. It is evident that, for them, academic/science literacy is achieved through the access to facts and scientific concepts as well as the possibility of using their own cognitive processes of academic practice. We understand, then, that respondents identified the need to read and understand natural phenomena, producing texts and discourses that express judgments about the impact of science and technology in the social environment.

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