

Evaluative appraisal by master's students on the teaching of reading and writing*

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Abstract

This article presents reflections about academic literacies, understood as social practices, ways of being, listening, reading, writing, acting, interacting, believing, valuing, feeling and using resources, tools and technologies capable of enacting and developing the identity that is characteristic of the academic sphere (FISCHER, 2007). In a qualitative-interpretative approach, we aim at analyzing the evaluative appraisals that students in a master's program in Communication and Society at a public university develop about the teaching of reading and writing in the academic sphere, considering the pedagogical means used by higher education teachers. As empirical evidence, we use excerpts of accounts from collective interviews conducted in 2019, where the subjects reveal their experiences with the reading and writing of academic speech genres. Based on data so generated, it can be affirmed that, considering the existence of pedagogical practices that guide understanding about speech genres, the students' evaluative appraisals indicate satisfaction and contentment in reading the texts. On the other hand, with regard to writing, their evaluative appraisals signal dissatisfaction and displeasure, due to the absence of pedagogical directions and the need for continuing education for teachers who: a) request texts for assessment purposes only; and b) do not provide enough information about the speech genre in which the texts requested are expected to materialize. The results suggest it is necessary to institutionalize activities for the teaching of reading and writing not only in undergraduate programs, but also in graduate ones, considering the dialogical, situated and uninterrupted nature of literacy processes in this discursive sphere.

Keywords

Academic literacies – Academic sphere – Teaching – Speech genres – Post-graduation.

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Introduction

As pointed out in many studies (MELLO, 2017; STEPHANI; ALVES, 2017; RODRIGUES; RANGEL, 2018), there is, in higher education, a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, higher education teachers are bewildered, disheartened or outraged to find that their students struggle with many challenges to write and understand texts required in the academic life: in general, they show various levels of difficulties in the literate practices involved in the academic sphere, from the lack of familiarity with grammar knowledge they supposedly should have developed in basic education to the inscience of conventions pertaining to academic speech genres, not detached from the hierarchical, ideological and power relations that pervade them. On the other hand, there are few institutionalized disciplines or activities dedicated to teaching academic speech genres that provide a space conducive to experience with higher education reading and writing, obviously connected to research and teaching practices in the case of undergraduate teacher education programs.

Based on these data, the thesis *Letramento de domínio acadêmico: teoria e prática (experiência em uma universidade pública)* [Academic Literacy: Theory and Practice (An Experience at a Public University)], defended in 2017, sought to identify the main actions taken by the institution analyzed to promote academic literacy, as well as the conflicts and tensions that undergraduates in a pedagogy program were faced with when they entered higher education. The study's findings showed that both the students entering the program and those about to complete it faced common challenges. This means that, in that context, a significant part of the students completed the undergraduate program without having developed significant writing and understanding practices regarding the texts that circulate in the academic sphere.

Considering the data that were obtained on that occasion, the following questions are proposed: When entering graduate education, are master's students offered disciplines/activities dedicated to helping them write and understand academic speech genres? What speech genres circulate in graduate programs? According to students' evaluative appraisals of activities dedicated to teaching the reading and writing of speech genres, how are these activities configured? Such questions influenced us to think about this article, which aims to analyze the evaluative appraisals³ that master's students develop about the teaching of reading and writing in the academic sphere, considering the pedagogical means used by higher education teachers.

Academic literacies: reading and writing in university

The new literacy studies (NLS) relate literacy to the idea that reading and writing are always situated in specific social practices influenced by the political, historical, cultural and socioeconomic contexts in which they materialize. In addition, unlike approaches

3- Based on the studies conducted by the Circle of Bakhtin, we understand evaluative appraisals as social value indices inherent in any word. For Bakhtin (2010), each concept produced in the word is accompanied by an appraisal accent. In the enunciation composition, the signs (words) are not neutral, but rather the object of ideological contests that reflect and refract material reality.

that conceive literacy as a set of individual, neutral and generical skills, as criticized by Street (1995) when he formulated the concept of autonomous literacy, the assumptions in the new literacy studies – based on results of studies – came to consider the nature of literacy as a specific social practice, i.e., dependent on the discursive sphere in which the language is inscribed. Thus, understanding literacy from the NLS perspective is to acknowledge its plural nature and its connection to the authors and their social roles, to space-time, to culture and to everything that is inherent in a certain discursive sphere, including political-ideological aspects.

Based on the assumption that we take on various roles and participate in various literacy practices, there emerges the notion of multiple literacies. In this respect, Fiad (2011) stresses that

[...] literacy practices, which are social practices, have a situated character, i.e., they have specific meanings in different institutions and social groups. Thus, assuming that the practices of use of writing are different, it can be assumed that there are multiple literacies, depending on the sphere and social groups: school, religious, family groups, etc. (FIAD, 2011, p. 361-362).

This means that, in every social sphere where we circulate, we need to experience a specific literacy, considering its situated – and therefore historical – character. Hence the use of the term in the plural: literacies. It is worth noting that considering literacies as social practices – the NLS proposal – implies associating them to the perspective of speech genres, since these are constituted as concrete, more or less stable forms of the uses of language.

Thus, speech genres become evident, and, according to Bakhtin (2016), they correspond to the various (oral and written) texts that circulate in society, through which speakers interact – and there lies their discursive nature. We interact through the use of language materialized in enunciations, which are concretized in speech genres. These are recognized by means of their thematic content (subject, the message conveyed), compositional features (the formal structure of texts of a particular genre) and style (individual selection and options: vocabulary, phrasal structures, grammatical preferences). Thus, from a Bakhtinian perspective, mastering a genre is a socially built behavior. Bakhtin (2016) notes that:

The wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex. (BAKHTIN, 2016, p. 12 [2010, p. 60]).

Thus, each discursive sphere (re-)elaborates and/or selects, in a bidirectional relationship, the speech genres that will be used as a means or a way of interaction between peers. For this reason, it can be said that speech genres organize language actions, since they validate discursive spheres' communication activities. This means that there is an

imbrication between discursive spheres and speech genres, as if the latter sewed human relationships into the former, like the space-time of production of situated enunciations.

Considering the foregoing, it is worth highlighting three aspects regarding the studies of literacy and of speech genres. The first is that literacies relate to the idea that writing, reading and orality are always situated in specific social practices that are produced and concretized in a political, cultural and socioeconomical time-space. The second is that speech genres are not without social value indices, since the word is always directed to a counter-word by means of which subjects enunciate their evaluative appraisals about themselves, the other and the world. The third is that a specific literacy is always a literacy in a particular speech genre, since “we can be literate in genres such as research report or business presentation” (LEMKE, 2010, p. 457). Hence the uninterrupted and situated nature of literacies.

In this direction, the studies of academic literacies are presented which aim to understand social and textual questions in the university sphere – in other words, to apprehend, as Fischer (2007, p. 45) stresses, anchored in Gee’s (1999) concept of discourse: “the ways of being, listening, writing, reading, acting, interacting, believing, valuing, feeling and using resources, tools and technologies capable of enacting meaningful identities” specific to this area (FISCHER, 2007, p. 45).

Lea and Street (1998) develop three non-exclusive models of use of writing in the academic sphere’s social practices: the model of studies of skills, which refers to the development of more generical skills of language use that can be applied/transferrable to other spheres; b) the model of academic socialization, regarding work performed by the discursive community, such as higher education teachers, in the process of integration of students into the academic practices; and c) the model of academic literacies, which assigns to the sphere of use of writing a fundamental role, since each knowledge area, considering the space-time and the historical and ideological subjects implied in it, produces its situated uses of writing which are pervaded by hierarchical and power relations and by various social identities. However, with regard to academic literacies, when the student enters higher education, he is faced with some aspects that make his inclusion into this sphere more difficult, such as the change in education level (and for this very reason, in discursive sphere) and the diversity of academic literate practices and, in them, of literacy events.

Lea and Street (1998) define the model of academic literacies, in sum, to explain the writing practices produced in the academic sphere, as well as to address the teaching of writing in university. In general terms, the two models, if isolated, have some limitations. The skills-based approach emphasizes only the formal aspects of writing, such as grammar, orthography and punctuation, and consequently disregards the social role of language and the context where the writing process emerges, assuming that, once the formal aspects of written language have been learned, the students have the skills to move around any literate practice. The academic socialization model approach, on the other hand, focuses on the acculturation of students by means of guidance on how to speak, reason, produce and understand the practices that are privileged in university and, to that end, it focuses on oral and written academic genres with an emphasis on their prototypical structure. It

is necessary to note that, while the skills and the socialization models comprise aspects that are relevant to academic writing practices, they do not comprise a characteristic that is intrinsic in language, namely language as a social practice.

Further, the model of academic literacies comprises the social practices situated in this sphere, considering, to that end, concrete situations of language use. In other words, it emphasizes mainly the social aspects about writing, hence the need to consider the conventions that regulate such practices. Moreover, it adds the need to focus:

[...] on the relationship of epistemology and writing not just in the subject area in general but also more generally, in institutional requirements (e.g. regarding plagiarism, feedback, etc.) and also in more specific contexts such as variation across individual faculty members' requirements and even individual student assignments. (LEA; STREET, 2014, p. 478 [2006, p. 369]).

Researchers such as Lea and Street (1998, 2014 [2006]), Gee (1999), Lillis (1999) and Russel (RAMOS; ESPEIORIN, 2009) have been conducting studies that prove that the difficulties experienced by students are mainly due to the fact that the conventions that regulate the academic sphere are different from those that guide basic education, from speech genres to the ways of acting and interacting. In addition, according to the authors, undergraduates are faced with numerous literate practices that are different from those that formed other education levels, as well as other space-times around which they circulate before entering the academic world. This means that the barriers related to reading and oral and written textual production tend to be faced by any subject who enters higher education without having actually experienced it.

The learning of that new language that circulates in academia is denominated by Gee (1999) as the learning of new Discourses – a concept developed at the core of NLS research. According to the author, the discourse “is a sort of ‘identity kit’ which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (GEE, 1999, p. 127). Therefore, if students are to feel they are ‘insiders’ – this term was used by Gee (2001) to refer to individuals’ entry into the spheres where they circulate – and develop a literate status in the academic discourse, then in addition to systematically working on the literate practices at specific literacy events, it is necessary, according to the author, to clarify the reasons why such practices are privileged in that sphere, and what their goals and meanings are. In other words, students need to learn and understand the conventions that circulate in and regulate the academic world (FIAD, 2011).

Unlike the concept of illiterate, according to NLS presuppositions, higher education students are literate; however, they still lack the necessary knowledge to enter the practices of academic discourse. In addition, most of them are exposed, throughout basic education, to conceptions of language that are often different from those they need in order to interact both in the academic world and out of it, since the teaching-learning of language is not directly related to social practices.

Likewise, many higher education teachers who do not reflect about the uses of language and the need to teach them to students entering this *sui generis* space-time start

from the assumption that, by the time students enter higher education, they have already developed the necessary knowledge to understand and produce the texts that circulate in academia, thus installing, according to Lillis (1999) the discourse of *deficit*.

The author adds that this view leads the higher education teacher to adopt the practice of mystery, as if students, many of whom come from deficient Brazilian schools, could discover by themselves the conventions of academic writing. In other words, students are required to write summaries, reports, reviews and scientific articles, just to name a few genres, and no pedagogical means are created to make such experiences possible. From this panorama emerge identity conflicts, since “there is much difference between who they are and who they are required to be and to perform in the academic sphere” (FISCHER, 2007, p. 113-114).

After looking briefly into the studies about academic literacies, we realize the breadth of the questions that involve the reading and writing, in the case at hand, of texts produced in the academic sphere. These questions involve dimensions of various natures, such as power relations, the identities and social roles, the conventions that regulate the oral and written modalities, the production of knowledge (STREET, 2014). Understanding the literacies from this perspective means acknowledging that, for each sphere in which the subject circulates and for each social role he takes on or is led to take on, it is fundamental to develop situated literacies.

Methodological paths

The present study, which is of a qualitative-interpretative nature, anchored in Literacies Studies and in Enunciation Theory, aims to analyze the evaluating appraisals by students about the teaching of reading and writing of academic speech genres at post-graduation level (master’s programs). Approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the institution of origin, this study involves eight students⁴ who hold a degree in journalism, work in the same area and are taking the third semester of a master’s program in Communication and Society at a Brazilian public university. The students were given fictitious names to preserve their anonymity.

Regarding the selection of subjects for the study – who signed an Informed Consent Term – we considered the fact that, generally, in the second year of the master’s program, students have already completed much of the disciplines and begun to write their research. The corpus for this analysis thus comprises accounts by these students which were given at collective interviews (KAUFMANN, 2013), which were conducted based on a semi-structured script. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

In order to analyze the evaluative appraisals (BAKHTIN, 2010) about the research questions addressed here, the enunciative means we used was collective interviews which were conducted in the first semester of 2019. It is worth noting that the students’ enunciations were analyzed with the Enunciation Theory, which considers that “[...] the

4- The day the instrument was administered, there were eight students from the master’s program in Communication and Society and three students from the master’s program in Computational Modeling in the classroom. For analysis purposes, the latter were excluded, considering the situated and characteristic role of language in each specific sphere (BAKHTIN, 2011).

more immediate and broader situation determines completely and, so to speak, from within itself, the enunciation structure” (BAKHTIN, 2010, own translation). For the linguist, the discursive sphere gives form to the enunciation as a concrete unit in the verbal/extraverbal communication chain.

Writing about writing requires writing about reading, the two inseparable companions of academic life, as Rodrigues and Rangel (2018) pointed out when they coined the process-word ‘reading-writing’. Considering the importance of reading for those who wish and need to produce academic texts, the first part of the interview addressed questions related to reading, whereas the second, to writing.

Results and discussion

Before we begin the analysis of our data, we open a parenthesis to go briefly into the experiences the students had regarding the uses of language during their undergraduate studies in order know their histories with academic literacy. The model of academic literacies advocated in this study problematizes that students’ literacy histories should be valued and used as a basis for developing literacy programs, considering, as Street (2014, p. 31) asserts, that “people are not ‘blank slates’ waiting for the initial mark of literacy”. As historical and ideological subjects in societies that give centrality to writing, undergraduate students enter higher education with accumulated experiences with writing and knowledge about writing which must be considered for their integration into academic social practices.

In the study’s setting, the characters are master’s students who completed undergraduate programs in Journalism. As higher education students, according to them, they read a lot, particularly photocopies of books and articles, which were the object of text discussion classes where the teacher spoke more than the students. They prepared seminars, i.e., they shared with two or three classmates the task of orally presenting a topic to an audience formed by the teacher and the other students. They wrote a few assignments, which consisted in hasty compilations of readings and were meant to be read only by the teacher of the discipline. After delivering the assignments, they got their grades (and thus the assignment’s main purpose was achieved), usually without comments. These procedures are in line with what was pointed out by Rodrigues and Rangel (2018) when they studied a class in an undergraduate Pedagogy licensure program at a federal university.

As they enter the master’s program, having participated in reading and writing practices of that nature, the master’s students are faced with the task of writing and understanding many academic speech genres. Thus, we propose the question: how do master’s students experience routine reading and writing practices with regard to the teaching and incidence of academic speech genres? This is the question we aim to answer in this study by means of a dialogue with these students.

Initially, we sought to identify the speech genres that have occurred in the master’s program with regard to reading and writing. To that end, we asked them: what texts/speech genres have you read and written most so far? With regard to reading, the participants said

that genres of a scientific nature predominated, such as scientific articles, dissertations, theses, books or extended summaries. Next, when we asked them about the recurrence of speech genres for writing purposes, the students listed:

Joana: Slide presentation, seminar, scientific article, project, dissertation.

Maria: Scientific article, seminar, summary, extended summary.

Alice: Article, research project, seminar.

Mariane: Review, articles and seminar.

Aline: Scientific article, seminar, research project.

Rafaela: Seminar, article.

Elis: Article, summary, seminar.

Lúcia: Seminar using slides (to illustrate items), scientific articles and research project.

In addition to naming the speech genres requested for writing purposes, the students, in dialogical tonalities that manifested dissatisfaction, collectively reported difficulty determining and differentiating the speech genres, as well as the fact that their teachers in general requested compositions, as shown in the accounts below.

Mariane: In fact, I still can't really distinguish summary from review, summary from extended summary, project from research report. I'm at a loss.

Elis: You end up not knowing what is what, because the teachers usually ask for a composition. And when they ask for a specific text, each teacher asks for the review in a different way.

Rafaela: I think even they don't know, because each of them asks for it differently.

As Bakhtin (2010) points out, everything that is expressed or can be expressed has an ideological value. These excerpts signal evaluative appraisals of displeasure due to a lack of knowledge of the speech genres' characteristics not only on the part of the students, but also on the part of teachers themselves, who, according to Aline, request those texts "now this, now that way".

Indeed, Alice stresses, "I'm at a loss", which suggests her criticism about her teacher's pedagogical practices, which, in her view, end up intensifying the imprecision of the features of the academic speech genre requested.

By analyzing the genres' incidence, we can see that, with regard to writing, genres of a scientific-academic nature are focused on, such as scientific article and research project. These data suggest that, unlike the undergraduate setting, where, in general, summary and review predominate (RODRIGUES; RANGEL, 2018; MELLO, 2017; STEPHANI; ALVES, 2017), at the master's level, the scientific article is the predominant speech genre.

Initially, based on these data, we were able to infer that this setting would reflect the academic discourse community and, obviously, a demand by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) for master's and doctoral students to publish scientific articles. Moreover, in graduate programs, students move further into – some even start – their profession as researchers. In a way, this has led graduate faculty to request students to write articles as the final assignment in their disciplines. Such

assignment is usually feared by master's students, and the texts they write are seldom published, as we will see below.

However, when we inquired about the purpose with which they wrote the academic genres requested, our hypothesis was discarded. Initially, the answers were unanimous: assessment.

Mariane: For assessment.

Aline: It's the form of final assessment in the discipline.

Rafaela: For assessment purposes.

Joana: Assessment, only one article was asked for publication, but I don't think anyone ever had it published.

Later in the interactions, the students gradually managed to associate goals to the particular genres. According to them, the genres requested for assessment purposes and seldom for publication – as noted by one of the students, always in a dialogical tonality of displeasure – are scientific article and extended summary; on the other hand, the genres solely for assessment purposes are seminar and summary, the latter also being requested in order to facilitate their understanding of scientific articles. This means that texts are asked sometimes in order to check learning, others (less often) to socialize knowledge.

Maria: The scientific article was asked for publication, grading, assessment; the seminar for assessing us; the summary, to facilitate readings for the dissertation; now the extended summary was also for assessment, and sometimes publication.

Alice: The article is the discipline's assessment instrument; the research project, you're required to write it as a draft of the chapter of the research project and for assessment in the discipline; the seminar can help you understand the text and it's an assessment in the discipline. We don't normally publish, no.

Elis: The article: the product of the discipline; summary: it helps you with your reading; seminar: works presented for assessment. I've never published anything.

Lúcia: In my view, the goal of the seminar is to understand the structure and how each author uses methodologies and how they apply them. Identifying the elements of the article or dissertation, such as problem, goals, method and results. The articles are meant for learning and sometimes for becoming a chapter of the dissertation.

Considering the enunciations above, it can be affirmed that, even though these master's students are able to establish the goals for the specific genres, their textual production, in general, comes down to an assessment instrument, according to their own evaluative appraisals. This fact is in line with Rodrigues and Rangel (2018), when they affirm, based on a study that analyzed the obstacles faced by students regarding academic writing, in an undergraduate Pedagogy program, that the texts requested were written just as a requisite to fulfill the tasks proposed in the disciplines.

The pedagogical directions mentioned by the students (re)affirm the assumptions internalized (rooted) by faculty about the teaching of writing, and which guide their

practices in the classroom for years. This question is in the basis of Street's (2014) distinction between autonomous literacy, a set of individual, neutral and context-independent skills, and the notion of literacies (in the plural), or ideological literacy, conceived as a collective construction that results from participation in social practices. From this perspective, we agree with Figueiredo and Bonini (2006, p. 418):

Linguistic phenomena are social in that whenever somebody speaks, listens, writes or sees, these actions are performed in socially conditioned ways and cause social effects. On the other hand, social phenomena are linguistic in that the linguistic activities that occur in social contexts are not a mere reflection or expression of social processes and practices, in fact, they are part of these processes and practices. The critical analysts of discourse believe that social practices and discursive practices support each other [...] language is both a source and a recipient of broader social and ideological discursive processes. Due to this interrelation between discourse and society, social institutions deeply depend on language. (FIGUEIREDO; BONINI, 2006, p. 418 – own translation).

This assertion leads us to consider that the teaching-learning of any speech genre must take into account the actual use of language, i.e., the mediate and immediate situation why and for which the texts are produced, the social and linguistic aspects of these texts (BAKHTIN, 2011). Thus, requesting textual production without considering the socialization of the texts produced “implies ignoring them as a social practice” (FIGUEIREDO; BONINI, 2006, p. 418).

Further, Bakhtin (2011) highlights that a subject develops linguistic competence when he experiences communicative situations and the various speech genres. He adds that it is these language use experiences that make the subject more experienced to identify, distinguish and understand the meaning and the structure of texts. However, it is common to find research conducted both in basic and in undergraduate education that finds that the sole purpose of textual production, when it is requested, is to check learning.

Unfortunately, by means of these students' voices in a tone of dissatisfaction, we realize that this practice is repeated in some master's programs. It is necessary to underscore that this fact goes against every theoretical assumption that understands language as a social practice, proposing for students to experience language in its fullness, i.e., participants, environments, artifacts and activities (HAMILTON, 2000), so that they can develop awareness about the functioning of the practice of language situated, in this case, in the academic sphere.

Later, in dialogues with the students, we asked them if there is any discipline that aims to help them understand and produce texts. In voices collectively produced, in dialogical tonalities that expressed discontent and anguish, they discoursed:

Aline: There isn't. In fact, the teachers frown on it, saying we want easy formulas, as if we were supposed to know.

Joana: These questions about teaching are fantasy. I didn't have it even as an undergraduate.

Alice: There isn't anything dedicated to teaching scientific writing.

In addition to identifying that there is no particular discipline or any other pedagogical action dedicated to teaching the production of academic genres in the program's curriculum, as with most graduate programs, such evaluative appraisals translate the idea that the teachers do not feel responsible for guiding students in the task of producing and understanding the texts they request. For this reason, in the interacting participants' discourse, it is possible to perceive displeasure due to the absence of pedagogical resources that help them grow familiar with academic discourse, and also a desire to find bases for writing their texts.

The teachers' stance is not different from what is pointed out by Andrade (2004, p. 1), for whom higher education teachers "abstain from producing a clear rationality and making this practice an explicitly regulated conduct". From the point of view of the authors, if such literate practices were made explicit, then students and teachers would have their specific places legitimized regarding writing and reading. However, it is possible to affirm that, in general, both at undergraduate and graduate level, teachers disengage from that task by resorting to the discourse enunciated/repeated by Alice: "you will learn by doing".

Continuing the interview, we asked them whether, within the disciplines, the teachers used pedagogical resources that, in their view, helped them in the process of textual production and understanding. With regard to reading, the students pointed out, in a tonality of satisfaction, that, in general, guidance is provided for understanding the texts analyzed. As significant means, they mentioned collective readings conducted in circles for analysis and discussion of the texts studied, and the activity of identifying aspects previously defined by the teachers, as guided reading.

In addition, one student said – at this point with an extraverbal expression signaling comfort:

In our class, some teachers would read the text with the class, each of us would read a part, and then each would give their opinion on what they understood. That made it really easy. So, if you didn't really get it, she (the teacher) added some notes, trying to clarify about what was being discussed. Some three disciplines were like this. It really helped.

The effectiveness of collective reading by means of reading circles was also identified by Mello (2017). In that study, which aimed to analyze the actions that promote academic literacy at a public university, specifically in classes in which texts of a scientific nature were used, one of the teachers adopted the same strategy mentioned by these master's students as relevant: collective reading by means of circles. The study showed the relevance of the strategy adopted by the teacher for working on academic reading, and that the simple fact of arranging the chairs in a circle was a way of giving the students space and leading them to understand that their stances were also legitimate. It was also found, according to the researcher, that the students understood that the meaning of the texts was built from dialogues established between the reader, the information and the author, subjects of the discourse.

Thus, it would be desirable for us teachers to develop awareness about our role as producers of reading: readers change, text supports change, but reading for study purposes continues to be a complex intellectual exercise that can be taught. In general, reading is conducted in schools as if all students, having acquired literacy, were able to approach different textual structures and to understand complex texts. The voices of these master's students reveal that, with the help from teachers by means of collective reading and directed understanding activities, reading occurred in a fluid manner, in a movement of (co-)construction of meanings. Thus, the obstacles related to reading practices were minimized due to the strategies adopted by the teachers and, as a result of this setting, the evaluative appraisals enunciated by the master's students in tonalities of comfort and self-confidence, expressed satisfaction, indicating that there is guidance for reading academic texts.

In contrast, writing activities are not configured in the same way. The master's students reported that textual production is requested without any type of guidance, whether regarding content, structure and, mainly, the genre in which the "composition" should materialize. They also reported that, in rare cases, guidance on writing was provided.

Mariana: They don't teach us what we're to do in order to produce the text requested. That makes me anguished. Clueless about what to do.

Joana: In fact, they ask you to write a composition.

Alice: Now that you're talking about this genre question, we realize they wanted us to write a review.

As Bakhtin (2011) asserts, every enunciation is produced for somebody, with pre-defined intentions. The enunciations produced by the participants, with the purpose of expressing their impressions about text writing practices, reinforce and signal two points worth highlighting: a) the confusion and ignorance about the nature of the speech genres, as addressed earlier; b) the discontent related to the absence of pedagogical resources for the writing of academic texts. These ideological threads indicate the lack of guidance for writing in this discursive sphere.

Based on the students' evaluative appraisals, one can infer that the teachers do not expatiate about the features of the texts requested, leaving implied essential information for producing any text, such as what genre should be written, in what situation or support it will be socialized and what the proposal's aim is. When the teachers propose tasks that fail to provide students with the possibility of planning their texts, of textualizing them in function of readers and determined goals, they contribute little to the (re)cognition of academic speech genres. In sum, Kersch (2014, p. 62) avers, "those who produce texts – students and teachers – are yet to be given complete and suitable guidance".

Considering the foregoing, it can be affirmed, as Street (2010) points out, that some dimensions remain hidden in the process of teaching-learning of reading and writing. Likewise, Rodrigues and Rangel (2018, p. 36) say there is "no guidance at all for these subjects who cannot seem to understand what the higher education teacher requests from them."

While we dialogued about academic speech genres' specific features, Joana asked permission to say she had remembered an action by a methodology teacher which, in a way, helped her develop her research.

Joana: I've just remembered something, it's not precisely about instructions for writing, but the teacher presented a research model that matched or was very similar to my research project.

Mariana: True. He didn't teach us the characteristics of texts before requesting, but he presented a model.

Aline: But he just showed the model, not in details, but it really helped.

Joana: But there was also another discipline where the teacher requested an article and gave the example by writing the first one.

Rafaela: In a few situations, we had guidance and directions, but some teachers presented a model for us to follow. That really helped, yes.

This fact is not different from what Mello (2018) points out in an experience report about the teaching of the scientific summary genre. On that occasion, the researcher presented various summaries published in a journal rated Qualis A1 to the students, subjects of the study, and discussed/analyzed a few questions intrinsic in that genre, such as its purpose, rhetorical organization and linguistic variety. Later, the scientific summaries produced in that experience were socialized at an academic event.

The participants understood that the strategy used, i.e., the reading and analysis of the same genre, provided some basis for writing, as with the master's students in this study, even though that presentation was not connected to a more in-depth analysis of the speech genre's characteristics and, mainly, not connected with the practices, the social uses in which those students participate.

While no explanation was given about the characteristics of the textual productions requested, the students said that the teachers always provided feedback about their texts. In this respect, we recall the discussion of Mendonça and Johnson (1994):

The peer interaction enabled by feedback activities allows students, through engagement in an exploratory conversation, to build the meaning within the context of the social interaction, while testing and working on new ideas, thus combining the cognitive and social aspects of language. (MENDONÇA; JOHNSON 1994 *apud* SOARES, 2008, p. 83).

In other words, joint reflection activities about the texts are extremely relevant for academic language development. However, because the teachers did not make explicit the genre in which the textual production should materialize, we wonder what those feedbacks consisted in: theme? Content? Form? According to the master's students, the assessment was restricted to interpreting the concepts approached in the texts, i.e., their understanding of the contents. They also said that those feedbacks "even helped us understand a few concepts, but not how to produce the text", Lúcia enunciated, in expressions that underscore the data analyzed earlier: there is guidance for text comprehension and a lack of guidance for writing the texts requested.

Considering these analyses and based on our experiences, we stress that, in general, teachers show difficulties guiding undergraduates and graduate students with the writing of academic speech genres, thus forming practices that fail to contribute to developing proper communicative competence for autonomous and authorial experience in academia.

As a result of this vision, we can see some disengagement from or incomprehension about the need to teach the writing of academic texts, considering that, in their pedagogical practices, normally, higher education teachers: (a) do not make explicit the purpose of written textual production activities; (b) do not present clear information regarding the textual production proposal; and (c) take the text produced as an object of assessment.

Final remarks

Aware about the limits and possibilities that this investigation presents to us, and knowing that, as Becker (2015, p. 76) says, “concluding is not finishing”, we present below a few considerations that the dialogue with the master’s students allowed us to produce.

Thus considering the evaluative appraisals that they collectively enunciated, a few aspects can be highlighted.

a) The master’s students expressed dissatisfaction and discontent due to the absence of specific disciplines or other actions dedicated to helping them, mainly, to produce the speech genres that circulate in the academic sphere;

b) The master’s students recognize that, within disciplines, some pedagogical resources are used which provide basis for understanding the texts analyzed. As examples, they mention: (1) reading in collective circles, by means of which the students expressed their impressions, established connections with knowledge developed in other knowledge areas, etc., and (2) activities dedicated to reading the text. These resources lead them to produce enunciations that express satisfaction and contentment with regard to the strategies used by the teachers; and

c) In contrast, due to the configuration of writing activities, which usually come down to assessment instruments requested without any reflection about the linguistic-discursive uses of genres, the students produce evaluative appraisals that indicate lack of guidance and dissatisfaction with regard to their teachers’ pedagogical practices.

It becomes evident to propose a revision about teaching practices with language both at undergraduate and graduate level. In this setting, the question emerges: in the context of systematized education, are there possibilities for exercises simulating the understanding and production of academic genres, or is it necessary to read and produce for social purposes only, with a defined addressee? This discussion is necessary in view of the discontent the interviewees showed regarding practices with the academic genres. On the other hand, this aspect assumes revising the curriculum and pedagogical practices in academia

Developing literacies implies, as affirmed in the course of this study, the initiation to new discursive modes and new ways of understanding, interpreting and organizing

knowledge (LEA; STREET, 1998). By the time they enter master's programs, students normally have had contact with a few academic speech genres, however, their experiences did not always take place fully, systematically and successfully, precisely because of the practice of mystery (LILLIS, 1999), the absence of systematized teaching of academic speech genres.

For this reason, in this study, we argue that, given the specific features of discursive practices in the university sphere, it is necessary to promote academic literacy as a means to the inclusion of master's students, perhaps doctoral students, into this discursive sphere inherent in a given knowledge area, viewing literacy as a power instrument, its impact on people's lives and its empowerment potential (JAMES, 1990, p. 16 *apud* AUERBACH, 2005), in addition to its close relationship with Brazilian scientific output. To that end, it is of the utmost importance to consider the evaluative demands expressed by the interviewees, by means of disciplines, workshops, lectures and minicourses dedicated to developing academic literacy.

Based on the foregoing, it is expected that this study will indicate some paths to building alternatives for a problem that spreads around universities, namely, the reading and writing of academic speech genres and the concomitant inclusion into literate practices in the academic world, which must by principle be a democratic space.

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