

Language capacities of a “dyslexic” English language learner

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ABSTRACT

Based on the concept of language as a socially organized activity, which allows human communication and work as an action instrument for social practices (Bronckart, 2003, 2006, 2007), we refute the concept of dyslexia traditionally (re)cognized as a learner’s written language learning disability (Massi, 2004a, 2007). The objective of this work is to present a case study in which a “dyslexic” student attended English language classes and a didactic sequence (Dolz; Noverraz; Schneuwly, 2004) developed to teach the referred language. Results showed that the activities included in the didactic sequence to explore the research subject’s linguistic-discursive capacity – a capacity directly related to the use of lexical items and grammatical rules – (Dolz; Pasquier; Bronckart, 1993) revealed the subject’s learning possibilities and language capacities thus deconstructing his severe dyslexic diagnosis.

KEYWORDS

dyslexia; the teaching and learning of English; language capacities; didactic sequence.

AS CAPACIDADES DE LINGUAGEM DE UM ALUNO “DISLÉXICO” APRENDIZ DE INGLÊS

RESUMO

Partindo do conceito de linguagem como uma atividade socialmente organizada que possibilita a comunicação humana servindo como instrumento de ação nas práticas sociais (Bronckart, 2003, 2006, 2007), refutamos o conceito de dislexia tradicionalmente (re)conhecido como um distúrbio de aprendizagem da linguagem escrita localizada no aprendiz (Massi, 2004a, 2007). Este trabalho objetiva apresentar um estudo de caso em que um aluno “dislético” frequentava aulas de língua inglesa e uma sequência didática (Dolz; Noverraz; Schneuwly, 2004) foi utilizada para ensino dessa língua. Os resultados revelaram que as atividades arroladas na sequência didática para explorar a capacidade linguístico-discursiva do sujeito de pesquisa – capacidade diretamente relacionada ao uso de itens lexicais e de regras gramaticais – (Dolz; Pasquier; Bronckart, 1993) mostraram suas possibilidades de aprendizagem e capacidades de linguagem, desconstruindo seu laudo de dislético em grau severo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

dislexia; ensino-aprendizagem de inglês; capacidades de linguagem; sequência didática.

LAS CAPACIDADES DE LENGUAJE DE UN ALUMNO “DISLÉXICO” APRENDIZ DE INGLES

RESUMEN

Partiendo del concepto de lenguaje como una actividad socialmente organizada que posibilita la comunicación humana sirviendo como instrumento de acción en las prácticas sociales (Bronckart, 2003, 2006, 2007) rechazamos el concepto de dislexia(s) tradicionalmente (re)conocida como un disturbio de aprendizaje del lenguaje escrita (Massi, 2004a, 2007). Este trabajo objetiva presentar un estudio de caso en que un alumno “dislético” frecuentaba clases de lengua inglesa y una secuencia didáctica (Dolz; Noverraz; Schneuwly, 2004) fue utilizada para la enseñanza de aquella lengua. Los resultados revelaron que las actividades desarrolladas en la secuencia didáctica para explotar la capacidad lingüística discursiva del sujeto de pesquisa –capacidad directamente relacionada al uso de itens lexicais y de reglas gramaticales– (Dolz; Pasquier; Bronckart, 1993) revelaron sus posibilidades de aprendizaje y capacidades de lenguaje, desconstruyendo su laudo de dislético en grado severo.

PALABRAS CLAVE

dislexia; enseñanza aprendizaje de inglés; capacidad de lenguaje; secuencia didáctica.

INTRODUCTION

Various studies indicate that “dyslexia” is commonly diagnosed in a precipitated and inconsistent manner (Collares; Moysés, 1986; Francisco, 2002; Keiralla, 1994; Massi, 2004a, 2004b, 2007; Moysés, 2008, 2010). This disorder is generally described as a learning disability, most frequently observed in the acquisition of reading and writing skills - directly related to words and letters - which causes a specific difficulty in identifying graphic symbols (Capellini; Navas, 2009; Pumfrey; Reason, 1998; Schneider; Crombie, 2003, and others) and also causing great difficulty in spelling (José; Coelho, 2008).

Understanding that the purpose of the teaching and learning of written language is to insert students in contexts that allow them to act in the world - for which reason the process goes beyond gaining command of spelling rules and the ability to recognize isolated words and letters - the aim of this article¹ is to present the results of a case study that investigated the learning possibilities of a Portuguese speaking Brazilian student (S) who had been diagnosed as severely “dyslexic” who was studying the English language.² The main language teaching instrument used was the “personal presentation letter” genre, which was didactically organized around the didactic sequence device, as proposed by Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004).

This study is theoretically and methodologically based on the ideas of socio-discursive interactionism, which is characterized as a science of the human being that, as postulated in Bronckart (2007), is part of a quite broad theme. Socio-discursive interactionism is neither a theory nor a method. It can be understood as a project that seeks to go beyond linguistics, and is an “integrated science of humans, which is focused on the dynamic that shapes language practices”. (*idem*, p. 20).

This paper is divided into six parts. The first presents how “dyslexia” is traditionally described and how it is understood in this study. The second part presents the concept of language based on socio-discursive interactionism. The third and fourth parts present the concept of language capacities and the didactic sequence procedure, respectively. The following part presents the methodological procedures, the context of the generation and analysis of data, and the results. The seventh and final part presents the conclusions.

WHICH “DYSLEXIA”?

Francisco (2002) and Massi (2004a; 2004b; 2007) affirm that different names have been used to refer to issues directly related to the learning and use of written language. Terms such as *dyslexia*, *learning difficulty*, *specific learning difficulties*, *reading*

1 This paper originated from the author’s doctoral thesis in language studies at the Universidade Estadual de Londrina (UEL), which was supervised by Dr. Vera Lúcia Lopes Cristovão and co-supervised by Dr. Gláís Sales Cordeiro (Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l’Education - FAPSE/Université de Genève)

2 Diagnosis issued by the Associação Brasileira de Dislexia [Brazilian Dyslexia Association].

and writing difficulties, learning disability, evolution dyslexia, development dyslexia or specific evolution dyslexia are some terms commonly employed as synonyms to explain or justify behaviors that deviate from the “standard” behavior expected from children during the phases of learning written language (Schrimmer; Fontoura; Nunes, 2004; Snowling; Stackhouse, 2004). *Roughly speaking*, the term *dyslexia* has been used to identify difficulties in learning how to read, write, and spell.

The Brazilian Dyslexia Association (*Associação Brasileira de Dislexia - ABD*) defines dyslexia “as a learning disturbance or disorder related to reading, writing and spelling” (ABD, s.d., p. 1). The Brazilian Dyslexia Association is associated to the International Dyslexia Association,³ which understands language as a code, and characterizes “dyslexia” as a specifically biological disorder related to the codification of words.

This characterization clearly links written language to a reductionist notion of coding and decoding of simple and decontextualized words. This view sees language as a code organized according to a set of sounds, letters, syllables and isolated words, void of significant context, and the learner as a passive being who merely memorizes repetitions (Massi, 2004a, 2004b, 2007).

The term *dyslexia* originated as a reference to a pathology hypothetically resulting from a cortical injury, which came to be used to diagnose individuals who had not suffered this kind of injury. As explained by Massi (2007, p. 28):

[...] originally, the interest in studying and explaining issues related to the appropriation of written language and their difficulties was linked to the medical field, which had used as assumptions localizationist research based on pathological cases of adults who, due to neurological damages, had lost their capacity for reading and writing, or had these capacities altered.

Massi (2004a) warns that, regarding causal explanations, the bibliography promoted leads us to the understanding that the concept of “dyslexia” linked to the acquisition of written language was developed by the medical field, far from a school context. This pathology was known as *acquired dyslexia*, which was related to adult subjects with brain injuries, which seems to have been used to support a misconceived view that used linguistic facts associated to the learning process and the use of writing as signs of a disease.

Although the existence of acquired dyslexia is not denied, that is, dyslexia related to aphasic events, Massi (2004a, 2004b, 2007) has sought to clarify that there are insufficient linguistic foundations to justify diagnoses of “dyslexia” in children fully engaged in the process of learning to write. Massi believes that the inconsistency related to the matter is such that current medical classifications and disease codification manuals, such as the International Classification of Diseases – 10, under code F81 (Dyslexia and other symbolic disorders, not classified elsewhere), understand “dyslexia” as a disorder with no etiological explanation to justify it. In

3 American association founded in 1949, in homage to neurologist Samuel Orton.

other words, a disorder with no defined cause that would affect learners while they were learning how to read and write.

Massi (2004a) warns that in studies and publications related to “dyslexia”, the concept still prevails that it is a disorder located in the learner; that the problem is intrinsic to the learner, and is caused by natural or emotional causes.

However, a careful analysis of the literature reveals a multiplicity of etiological sources, symptomatic and also terminological arbitrariness surrounding that so-called pathology, indicating a complete conceptual imprecision concerning what has been conventionally characterized and diagnosed as a dyslexic syndrome (*idem*, p. 2).

Massi (*idem*, p. 4) understands language to be a “constitutive activity, a collective, historical and social work, capable of incorporating the subject and his specific activities of construction, use and interpretation of writing” and therefore, questions studies that defend evaluations and diagnoses of what is commonly known as “dyslexia” based on tasks of coding, decoding, the reading of isolated words and pseudo words⁴, as described in Capellini et al. (2009), for instance.

Therefore, it is necessary to present the concept of language underlying this paper, considering that it differs from those used in definitions of dyslexia found in most works addressing this issue. This theme will be explored in the subsequent section.

THE CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE BASED ON SOCIO-DISCURSIVE INTERACTIONISM

Cristovão (2001) synthesizes the definition of language used here as that presented by Bronckart (2008), in five basic assumptions:

- 1) language is dialogic;
- 2) it materializes itself in an idiom recognized in a certain community;
- 3) it is not stable;
- 4) language is signification in the construction of thought and in the construction of knowledge; and
- 5) the communicative-social dimension of language implies marks of alterity and inter-subjectivity.

Therefore, all and any activity involving language must consider the broader objectives of communicative processes, such as the recipient, the emitter, the purpose of interaction, and not be limited to isolated words outside real contexts of communication. According to Schneuwly & Dolz (2004, p. 76), “every form of communication [...] is crystallized in specific language forms.” Therefore, these authors

4 Also known as logatoms.

understand that schools have always worked with various genres as instruments of communication. The proposal of researchers who affirm that teaching should use certain genres is that these genres also be considered as a objects of teaching and learning.

The very notion of language capacities defined by Dolz, Pasquier and Bronckart (1993) as the aptitudes necessary to elaborate a text in a given situation of interaction, can be seen as an obstacle if the most broadly disseminated and socially accepted definition of dyslexia is that it is a neurological disease that exclusively compromises written language in situations that are not linked to the production of text with communication purposes in interactive situations .

Socio-discursive interactionism understands that “language is the central tool that mediates and guides human activities” (Bronckart, 2007, p. 19) and “combines and integrates the parameters of the context of production and of thematic content, such as a specific agent who mobilizes them when entering a verbal intervention”. (Bronckart, 2003, p. 99).

In accord with Érnica (2007), I understand that, by recognizing language as an activity that mediates human interactions, socio-discursive interactionism sees it as a means by which the human species organizes itself (in the semiotic plan) to guarantee communication and thoughts of socially organized subjects and, at the same time, provide them instruments for acting. This takes us to Lopes (2007, p. 235), who affirms that according to socio-discursive interactionism language is “essential for human development and responsible for the organization and regulation of human actions and interactions [...]”.

Socio-discursive interactionism proposes a model for analyzing texts, which are understood as “frameworks of *social activity* in which *language actions* take place” (Machado, 2005, p. 258, emphasis added), that identifies and considers the similar characteristics of texts that circulate in different social spheres and, based on the recurrent traces, selects the elements that can be taught within a didactically organized proposal. In this perspective, socio-discursive interactionism does not understand the texts to be the real object of teaching. This object is the development of the language operations that students need to mobilize to be able to socially act by using texts (either oral or written): these are the language capacities.

LANGUAGE CAPACITIES

The first concepts of language capacities for oral and written comprehension and production were initially formulated by Dolz, Pasquier & Bronckart (1993) and later expanded on by Dolz & Schneuwly (1998). Dolz, Pasquier & Bronckart (1993, p. 30) define language capacities as “aptitudes required to prepare a text in a situation of a given interaction”⁵. Although the authors propose they be divided into three, it is important to emphasize that the language capacities are directly

5 “[...] aptitudes requises pour la réalisation d’un texte dans une situation d’interaction déterminée [...]” (Dolz; Pasquier; Bronckart, 1993, p. 30, the authors’ translation).

intertwined and one cannot be used dissociated from the other. They are constituted by capacities for action, discursive capacities and linguistic-discursive capacities, the definitions of which are presented below.

According to Dolz & Schneuwly (1998), the capacity for action involves situations of the use of language in a given moment of interaction and in a certain context shared by a speaker, which allows him to adapt his language production to situations of communication and characteristics of the context in which the interaction takes place. The authors also point out that the capacity for action is directly related to

- 1) the representations the emitter of a text has concerning the physical context where the action takes place, including the time and place of production, as well as his representations about whether receivers are present or not;
- 2) the representations of situations of communication related to the social location in which the interaction takes place, the objective of the interaction and the social position of the participants; and
- 3) the student’s knowledge of the world, which can be used when producing a text.

The authors consider the capacity for action as the most complex capacity, since it is the first capacity developed by a child (individual). When children are able to perform verbal interactions, they then begin to use language in contexts of communication that are shared and structured as a function of the psychological representations related to the social medium where the interactions take place and the knowledge of the world they have stored, which will be crucial to the production of a text.

The discursive capacity is defined as “aptitudes to mobilize the relevant discursive models to a certain action.”⁶ (Dolz; Pasquier; Bronckart, 1993, p. 30). They involve the choices the speaker/producer makes about the types of discourse, to perform a language action.

Finally, the linguistic-discursive capacity is defined by Dolz, Pasquier and Bronckart (*idem, ibidem*) as the “ability to command the multiple psycholinguistic operations required to produce a unique discourse.”⁷

The linguistic-discursive capacity refers to linguistic operations directly involved in the production of a text. It involves four types of operations, which can be grouped as follows, based on Bronckart (2003):

6 “[...] des capacités discursives, ou aptitudes à mobiliser les modèles discursifs pertinentes pour une action déterminée.” (Dolz; Pasquier; Bronckart, 1993, p. 30, the author’s translation).

7 “[...] des capacités linguistico-discursives enfin, ou capacités de maîtrise des multiples opérations psycholinguistiques requises pour la production d’un discours singulier.” (Dolz; Pasquier; Bronckart, 1993, p. 30, the authors’ translation).

Table 1 – Linguistic operations directly implied in the production of a text.

Type of Operation	Operations involved	Definitions	Examples
1) Textualization Operation	Connection Operations	Different levels of text organization are explained.	Organization among the parts, discourse segments, interventions, separations, integration between the discourses, etc.
	Nominal Cohesion Operations	Introduce arguments and organize the recovery in the text sequence.	Use of anaphoras.
	Verbal Cohesion Operations	Reestablish the recovery between predicate series or verbal syntagma.	Including the choice of verbs and verbal inflections that will give meaning to the thematic coherence.
2) Enunciative Voices		Developed by two types of operations: the different enunciative voices present in the text (author, character, others), and the modalization expressions commented and assessed within the thematic content by the author and the characters.	These modalizations can provide a value of truth, express obligation, right, pattern, and appreciation.
3) Enunciation Construction Operation		Comprise sentences and statements: a sentence, as simple as it may be, only reveals its real meaning depending on the context in which it is produced. Intonation is considered as part of the physical context, since it can provide several meanings to a sentence. The bond established within a statement is based on the possibilities of interference of information due to the discursive memory of the speakers.	
4) Lexical Choices	Words with semantic variations, containing precise syntactic and phonological properties.	Constitute a set of operations that strongly interact with other levels, since lexical elements are organized in the memory of the speakers and nominal cohesion operations that place them in greater evidence.	

Source: Tonelli (2012, p. 93)

Considering that the capacity for action is related to the broader context and to the search for information - such as the characteristics of the context of the production of text, who produced it, for whom, the purpose of interaction, when and where, as well as the student's knowledge of the world - activities were

developed that focus on the development of writing a personal presentation letter. This genre was chosen considering the context in which the group of students and, more specifically, the particular research subject was inserted. At the time this study was conducted, the English language teacher asked me, the author of this article, the teacher-researcher,⁸ to work with writing forms in which the student could talk about himself, which was the theme planned for the beginning of the school year in the English language classes.

Regarding the discursive capacity, related to the organization of content in the text, this was also contemplated in the activities. Finally, to explore the linguistic-discursive capacity, which involves the use of conjunctions and their role, the use of pronouns, verbal tenses, modalization and lexical choices, this was also explored in the activities that were part of the didactic sequence, and used to investigate if they are mobilized by the student who was diagnosed as dyslexic.

Based on the development of the concept of language capacities, Dolz, Pasquier & Bronckart (1993) systematized work with textual genres based on the didactic sequence device, to allow the teaching and learning of a certain genre based on the real needs of students.

Considering the proposal for teaching and learning of written production in the English language to a student diagnosed as “dyslexic”, based on activities related to the textual genre, “personal presentation letter”, with activities organized in a didactic sequence, the concept of this didactic device plays an important role in this study and, therefore, will be addressed in the following item.

THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF A DIDACTIC SEQUENCE

In keeping with Massi (2004a; 2007), I recognize that it is necessary to consider the historicity of the language, of the subject, and his linguistic actions in situations of effective use of written language, as well as the social context in which it is being used, when it is understood that the subject is a student with learning difficulties. That said, I will investigate how the proposal to use the didactic sequence device may contribute to the teaching and learning of English language, considering what has been understood as a language learning disorder or, more specifically, “dyslexia”.

As proposed by Dolz, Noverraz & Schneuwly (2004, p. 97), a didactic sequence is “a group of school activities that are systematically organized around an oral or written textual genre”. Moreover, according to those researchers, a didactic sequence seeks to help students to know a certain textual genre, enabling them to write or speak in a more appropriate way in a certain communication situation. As the authors emphasize, for communication to be effective, there must be an adaptation to the communication situation and although there many genres, some

8 It is important to clarify that during the application of the activities for collecting data, the author took over the English language classes of the group in which student S took part. For this reason, the author is referred to as a teacher-researcher.

regularities can be observed. It is these “regularities” that characterize a genre and, therefore, make communication possible.

The central proposal of working with a didactic sequence is to explore genres over which the students do not have command or those in which they need to improve. Dolz, Noverraz & Schneuwly (*idem*) propose that a didactic sequence be built in four stages, namely:

- 1) presentation of the situation;
- 2) an initial production (or first production);
- 3) the modules; and
- 4) the final production.

In general terms, the presentation of the situation consists in the explanation of the communicative project and the introduction of a reflection on the characteristics of the situation. This is a fundamental stage, since it defines a communicative activity that must be performed and offers guidance about producing the texts. At this point, the class project is presented to the group. The project will involve a significant practice of the use of language, crystallized in the texts. Additionally, a detailed description is provided of the tasks the students must undertake.

After this, the students prepare a first text (either oral or written) using the genre being worked with. It is at this stage that the teacher can diagnose the capacities over which the students already have command, and those that need to be further developed. The modules include various activities that may provide tools to the students for working on the chosen genre, and for systematizing and further developing the issues presented in the initial production. Also, as Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004, p. 110) affirm, modularity in work with textual genres provides “pedagogical differentiation”. That is, it considers the heterogeneity of the learners, which is certainly a challenge in the educational context and especially when teaching English language to “dyslexic” students.

On this matter, Dolz, Noverraz & Schneuwly (2004, p. 110-111) affirm that

The differences between students, far from being disastrous, can be used to enrich the class, as long as an effort is made to adapt. From this point of view, the didactic sequences present a great variety of activities that must be selected, adapted and transformed according to the students’ needs [...].

Another fundamental characteristic in this teaching proposal is the fact that, in the modules, the teacher can adapt the activities to the needs of the class, to certain groups of students or to the specific needs of a single student. For these reasons, I believe that working with textual genre, using the didactic sequence tool, can greatly contribute to the teaching-learning of written language for students who are in the process of constructing this knowledge or those who present any kind of limitation in this context.

Then, in the final production stage, the students place in practice the knowledge explored. This phase is also used to assess the aspects worked with during the didactic sequence.

The interventionist characteristic of this research is situated in the application of a didactic sequence as a proposal for the teaching-learning of English language in the context being studied. Therefore, all of the steps of the didactic sequence were prepared considering activities and work systematics that could assist the teaching and learning of the English language for the student diagnosed as “dyslexic”.

DATA GENERATION AND ANALYSIS

Data was generated in two phases: observation and implementation. In the first phase (observation), I, the professor-researcher, followed the student who was the research subject (S) in 19 English classes in a state school in a city in Northwestern Paraná. In this phase, there was no direct intervention by my part as the researcher. I only observed and recorded the classes using diaries and video. With the data collected, the second stage (implementation) was begun, in which data were generated from the development and application of a didactic sequence for the “personal presentation letter” textual genre. In this phase, 12 classes were used for the development of the initial production, the modules (including rewriting the letter), the final production of the letter, the reading of the response to the letter, and the written production of the final response. In the first stage of data generation, the student who is the research subject, S, was in the 5th grade of elementary school,⁹ and there were 38 students in his group. The English language classes took place twice a week, for fifty minutes each. The second stage took place in the following year with the same group, which is now in the 6th grade.

It is important to emphasize that, as Dolz, Noverraz & Schneuwly (2004) propose, the work with a didactic sequence should take place within a class project. In the case of this study, the students exchanged letters with children from a school in a different city in the same state, with a clear communicative purpose: using written comprehension and production in the English language to speak about themselves and get to know another person.

To identify the learning possibilities and the language capacities already developed in the student, two sets of data were analyzed:

- 1) the transcripts of the classes given and;
- 2) activities performed by the research subject during the classes implemented.

Due to spacial constraints, this paper will present excerpts from the transcripts of only two classes and four activities, to identify and explore the linguistic-discursive capacity of the research subject S.

⁹ Now the 6th and 7th year, respectively, due to the restructuring of the Brazilian school system.

To explore the language operations related to the linguistic-discursive capacities, the activities were focused on the use of the most common linguistic units used in a personal presentation letter, for example, personal and possessive pronouns, verbs in the present simple tense, adjectives, conjunctions and lexical tools that allowed writing in the explored genre.

Considering that a didactic sequence is designed to offer students multiple opportunities to act socially using written texts and, at the same time, meet the students' specific needs (Dolz; Schneuwly, 2004) to explore the linguistic-discursive capacity of the research subject, activities were developed (Table 2) to address, by analyzing the student's first production, the most salient aspects in terms of a lack of command or the most common difficulties.

The activities were designed and developed to have the student, based on the reference text – Camila's letter,¹⁰ identify not only the pronouns, but the role they play within that genre.

Table 2 – Activity to explore the use of pronouns in the genre “personal presentation letter”

<p>OBSERVE...</p> <p>ANA IS MY SISTER. ANA IS NINE YEARS OLD. ANA IS TALL. THERE IS SOMETHING STRANGE... WHAT COULD THAT BE?</p> <p>5) LOOK AT THE TABLES ABOVE. THE SUBSTANTIVE ANA IN THE SECOND AND THIRD SENTENCES CAN BE REPLACED BY WHICH PRONOUN?</p> <p>6) WHAT WOULD THAT BE? ANA IS MY SISTER. _____ IS NINE YEARS OLD. _____ IS TALL.</p> <p>7) WHICH PRONOUNS CAN BE USED TO INDICATE OBJECTS OR PLACES IN THE SINGULAR FORM? _____</p> <p>8) WHICH PRONOUNS CAN BE USED TO INDICATE PEOPLE OR OBJECTS IN THE PLURAL FORM? _____</p>
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Source: Tonelli (2012, p. 209)

Following the data presentation form, excerpt 1 from the class is presented below.

EXCERPT 1 (Tr = Teacher researcher, Ss = Student research subject)

1. Tr: Let's look at the activity below. Look! Observe the tables on top. The noun Ana in the second and third sentences can be replaced by which pronoun?

The teacher-researcher once again points to sheet S', which is still on the desk.

10 This letter of presentation presentation, kindly provided by Beato-Canato (2009) is part of the author's doctorate research. This letter was used throughout the didactic sequence for the students to compare it with the first personal presentation letter explored as a reference text.

2. Ss: *She!*
3. Tr: *She!* Is that right? And then I will have,! *Ana is my...*
4. Ss: []
5. Sf.: Sister.
6. Ss: []
7. Tr: *Ana is my?*
8. Ss and Tr: *Sister!*
9. Tr: Well, I will not use *Ana* again.
[...]
10. Tr: She is nine years old. And then what do I use again? What do I use again?
11. Ss: *She.*
[...]
12. Tr: And then, we avoid what?
13. Sf.: Repetition.
14. Tr: Repetition, *ok?*

According to Excerpt 2, it can be noted that, during these activities, the teacher-researcher conducts a mediation closer to S, and, from the information contained in that activity, for instance, a table with all the pronouns, led the student to reflect on the answers.

EXCERPT 2

1. Tr: Look, I have the following ... the following sentences ... Ana, right there at *OBSERVE ... Ana is my sister. Ana is nine years old. Ana is tall.* There is a statement here that ... there is something strange here ... what conclusion did we reach in the last class?
2. Sf.: It is repetitive.
3. Tr: What is repetitive?
4. Sm: Ana.
5. Tr: I repeat the name Ana. So we were reviewing the PRONOUNS. Instead of repeating Ana, Ana, Ana, I can replace that ANA with which pronoun?
6. Ss: *She ...*
[...]

7. Tr: Let's do **number seven. Number seven, eight and nine.** When you reach **number nine**, stop and the teacher will take over. Ok? **Five minutes.** All right? Let's go... let's do it.
8. *The researcher-teacher approaches the research subject student S.*
9. Tr: OK. [] the pronouns? The pronouns replace the names.
10. *Student S positively nods his head.*
11. Tr: Look, look at this activity. I have all pronouns in this table. In English, what do I use to say [eu] I ?
12. S: **I.**
13. The student has the list of pronouns on the activity sheet.
14. Tr: That's it. I have all pronouns here. So, let's see... what is activity number six asking?
15. The student stares at the activity sheet for approximately sixteen seconds, babbling the wording of the activity.
16. Tr: These pronouns here **in English.** Which pronouns can be used to indicate objects or places in the singular ? Is **I** used to indicate an object?
17. Student S negatively shakes his head.
18. Tr: **You? He? She?**
19. *Student S continues to negatively shake his head.*
20. S: That one.
21. *Student S points with the tip of the pen to the "it" pronoun.*
22. Tr: **It** ... that's right.

Based on the activities and excerpts presented, it can be noted that when work around a certain genre is proposed, the value of working with lexical and grammatical matters is not disregarded. However, they are explored within a context, seeking to show the students the social use and function of the language, within a textual perspective.

Based on the attitudes of student S, it can be stated that he:

- 1) read the pronouns;
- 2) used the information systematized in the didactic sequence to perform the activity; and
- 3) used prior knowledge to identify the answers to complete the activity.

It is important for this study to recall that the student, due to his diagnosis as "dyslexic" was thought to have great difficulty in handling letters and words and, therefore, it would be very difficult, and in some visions about dyslexia impossible, for him to appropriate this information, re-elaborate it and transpose it to other situations of use of language.

Although this activity may suggest that it just involved copying words, it is important to review the context of the production. In that class, the student was faced with a new activity, in which lexical-grammatical items were not explored outside the context of the textual unit.

As noted by Dolz & Schneuwly (2004, p. 52, emphasis added),

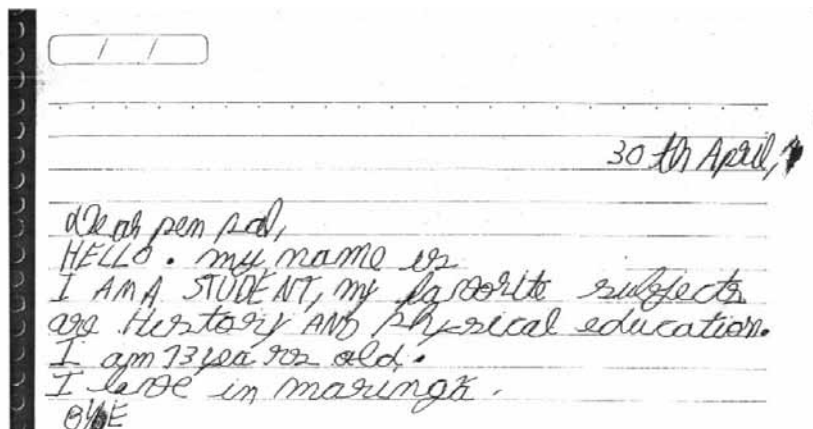
The development of language capacities always partially constitutes itself *in a mechanism for reproduction*, in the sense that models for language practice are available in the social environment and that members of society that have command of them have the opportunity to adopt explicit strategies so that learners can use them.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that, despite the diagnosis of the student as the bearer of a disorder related to words and letters, the most common characteristics of that alleged difficulty were not confirmed: he did not switch, mirror, suppress, add or agglutinate letters.

Therefore, it is necessary to make it clear that although student S consulted other sources (the glossary in the textbook, a notebook and or the activities of the didactic sequence), he was not unconsciously reproducing the information identified. To the contrary, the student’s initiative to use the material available indicates the conscious action of someone who is having his first formal contact with the teaching and learning of the English language and who is able to handle resources that will allow him to complete the activities proposed. According to the specialized literature in “dyslexia”, someone with dyslexic symptoms would not be able to use these resources as did the research subject.

Due to the results presented herein, it is necessary to consider that the student is not a blank page or a *tabula rasa*. He is a carrier of knowledge, values, concepts and references that can help him to overcome obstacles that inevitably will appear during the teaching-learning process, including that of English language. Proof of this is the final production of the personal presentation letter written by student S himself, presented in figure 1.

In general, it can be noted that the student already had developed language capacities. However, when he was in decontextualized teaching-learning situations, the research subject had difficulties with the language. Based on studies by Massi (2004 a, 2004b, 2007) this fact cannot be attributed to an alleged pathology centered on the student. It is always necessary to consider the production conditions in which written texts have circulated and, therefore, identify to what extent the limitations are physical or are essentially behavior that deviates from patterns defined by society, and schools.



A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper. The paper has a vertical margin line on the left and horizontal lines for writing. At the top, there is a small rectangular box containing the number '11'. The date '30th April' is written in the top right corner. The text of the letter is written in cursive and reads: 'Dear pen pal, HELLO. my name is I AM A STUDENT, my favorite subjects are History AND Physical education. I am 13 years old. I live in Marung. O/E'.

Figure 1 – Personal presentation letter written by S

Source: Tonelli (2012, p. 284).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper presents an activity that is part of a didactic sequence, which sought to explore the linguistic-discursive capacity of a student diagnosed with “dyslexia”, using as the perspectives for analysis the concepts of language capacities, the available bibliography about “dyslexia” and studies that question how this disorder is diagnosed.

Anchored by the theoretical-methodological assumptions of socio-discursive interactionism, which consider language as a socially-constructed activity, that is a producer of meanings and constitutive of human thought (Bronckart, 2003, 2007, 2008), the study began with the premise that language is not something ready for use, and that it is up to the student to simply acquire it. I understand that each individual, inserted in contexts where language is used to act in and by means of social activities, simultaneously constitutes and is constituted by human action. That is, an individual cannot be considered as a blank sheet.

Based on Dolz, Noverraz & Schneuwly (2004), Dolz & Schneuwly (1998) and Schneuwly (2004a; 2004b), this study, as well as others inserted in the same perspective of language that I have used here, the “deviations” in written language in English language made by a student diagnosed as “dyslexic” are not a pathology within the student, but a sign that the student is, in fact, working with a language that is new to him.

The student used information provided in the didactic sequence, and retrieved it to advance in the teaching-learning process for the English language. Regarding language capacities, it can be concluded that based on the material available and in mediation with the teacher-researcher and peers, the student developed them in contextualized teaching-learning situations of writing in the English language, revealing his learning possibilities and his language capacities.

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