

The polyphony in infantile narrative discourse

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In this paper we attempt to examine the existence of distinct voices, as well as their development in the narrative oral discourse of 30 Portuguese speaking children ranging from 2 years and 5 months old to 5 years and 5 months old. We separated these children into three age groups, with ten children each, which we called G1 (children from 2;5 to 3;5.29), G2 (children from 3;6 to 4;5.29) and G3 (children from 4;6 to 5;5.29). Each child should produce three kinds of narratives: a personal report¹, a report based on a sequence of pictures and a fictional report. As not all children produced the three kinds of report, we obtained a total of 78 narratives.

The questions which guided this investigation were the following:

- 1) Since the first attempts to narrate, does the child start, be alone or with an adult interlocutor, to use distinct voices (author, narrator and character)?
- 2) How does the child distinguish these voices in linguistic terms?
- 3) Which is the developmental course each discourse voice takes in the children's narrative discourse?

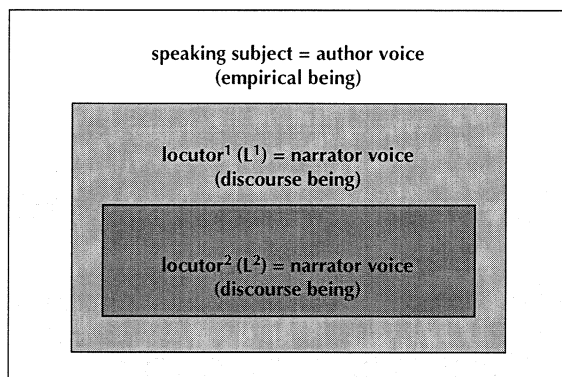
In order to answer such questions, we looked for theoretical material to study the different voices, present in the discourse, in authors such as Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Ducrot (1987), who believe that our speech, though materially, originates from an only speaking subject, discursively, it reveals the presence of distinct voices from the one who effectively produced it.

To begin with, we take into consideration Bakhtin's argument, who considers that an author, in a narrative, can be compositionally absent, being substituted for the voice of a narrator which in his turn, can present the voice of the characters. Thus, the narrator's and the characters' voice, though being object of the author's intention, work in his discourse as **other subject's voices**, characterizing the **polyphony** of the narrative.

Besides Bakhtin position, we also take into consideration Ducrot's **doubled utterance phenomenon**, which occurs when the utterance meaning assigns two distinct locutors to the utterance, as in the following example: Carla says: «Maria told **me**: **I** will leave». According to Ducrot, we have here two first person marks which send us to different discourse beings, characterizing the utterance presentation as doubled (a L¹ responsible by the utterance as a whole and a L² responsible by part of L¹ utterance).

Based on this, we try to approach Bakhtin's polyphony notion, applied to narrative analysis, to Ducrot's polyphony notion, applied to utterance analysis, which conducted us to propose the following chart of narrative «figures»:

CHART 1



Based on this chart we attempt to clarify the theoretical environment which helped us verify the **polyphonic** aspect of children's language.

Reviewing the literature related to the children's voices usage we can see their characterization and development with Wolf & Hicks (1989), the insert of the quoted speech on the speech that quotes with Hickmann (1982), and the emergency, during the narrative discourse development, of direct and indirect discourses with Perroni (1992).

Based on this, we characterize each voice as it can be seen in the following chart:

CHART 2

| Characteristics | Author voice (av) | Narrator Voice (nv) | Charater Voice (cv) |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|
| Referential System | 1 ^a and 2 ^a pronominal persons | 1 ^a and 3 ^a pronominal persons | 1 ^a and 2 ^a pronominal persons |
| Utterance Forms | - imperative - exclamative - interrogative - declarative | - declarative | - imperative - exclamative - interrogative - declarative |
| Tense System | present prevails | past prevails | present prevails |
| Conectives | hardly ever used | widely used | hardly ever used |
| Conjunction | - | que/that (present in indirect quotations) | - |
| Interjections | - | - | widely used |
| Verb Semantic Type | - | action (play, swim,...) | physical states (think, feel,...) |
| Intonation | normal | normal | it changes |

Due to previous analysis we did on our data, we included onomatopoeias as **character's voice (cv)**. We also included non-verbal actions as character's presence, classifying them as **cv** due to the fact that they are related to the original narrated situation (the moment when characters interact) and not to the present narrated situation (moment when the narrator tells the events). On the other hand, the «evaluating utterances» and the «codas» were classified as **author voice**, since they account for the narrative insert in a given interlocution situation. The «evaluations» showed the author's position concerning what he narrates and the «codas» constitute a formal closing for the narrative, as an indication of the end of his report to the interlocutor.

The example of Caio's personal report (3;8) below shows the usage of these voices:

- *INT: *conta o que aconteceu contigo, alguma coisa.*
*CAI: *eu (es)tava na garupa do velho +...(nv)*
*CAI: *eu fazi [: fiz] xixi na garupa do velho. (nv)*
%com: *as duas ocorrências de «velho» foram pronunciadas «véio».*
*INT: *bah e aí?*
*CAI: *aí ele disse +/.» (nv)*
*CAI: *+» quem fazeu [: fez] xixi na minha garupa? (cv)*
*CAI: *daí eu disse +/.» (nv)*
*CAI: *+» eu. (cv)*
*CAI: *eu pulei da garupa dele e dei um chute no pescoço dele daí ele caiu e +/.» (nv)*
*CAI: *+» poin@o. (cv)*
*CAI: *machucou a cabeça. (nv)*
*INT: *e aí terminou?*
*CAI: *sim, daí tinha um carro na água, né@i ele foi atropelado, aí veio a polícia e quebrou o carro do outro cara. (nv)*
*CAI: *só sei essa. (av)2*

Our results made clear that, since the child's first narratives, she presents distinct voices in the narrative, which seems to reveal the existence of **polyphony** since a very first attempt to narrate. However, we found out interesting differences in each age group, which show that the child goes through distinct phases in the construction and insertion of **other subject's voices** in the interior of her author voice during the course of her narrative discourse development.

Thus, our analysis pointed out the following voice developmental line in the groups analyzed: the presence of onomatopoeias in G1, which acted as a preparatory **protovoice** of **cv** development, occurred in G2 with the increase of utterances that reveal the characters' speech content and, in G3, the finally establishment of the child's as narrator, what can be observed as the child makes a **plurifunctional** usage of **nv** (indirect speech). Also the child starts to behave as author, since she refines the **av** function, which organizes the other voices around this one and starts to dialog with the interlocutor about what she narrates, her identity as author becoming evident. This seems to reveal that the child, besides empirical being (responsible by the speech materialization), becomes the discourse being, when she becomes narrator and locutor and her authorship reveals responsibility in the narrative discourse organization.

NOTES

¹ In this paper we used the term «report» to refer to fictional, personal narratives as well as the ones done

from a sequence of pictures. Therefore this term is being used in a general sense and not Perroni's (1992) specific sense which is only related to personal narratives.

² The reports transcription was done based on the CHAT program, CHILDES system (Mac Whinney & Snow, 1991), which is in process of adaptation to Brazilian Portuguese by the project *Desenvolvimento da Linguagem da Criança em Fase de Letramento* «Children's Language Development during Literacy Phase». (Guimarães, 1992).

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