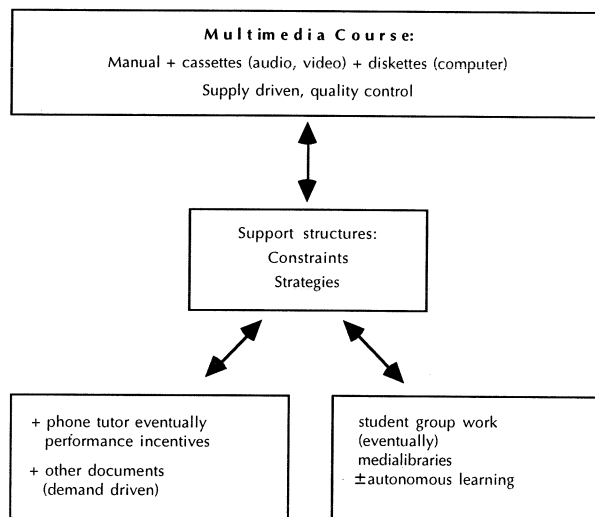


Manuals: The construction of sense

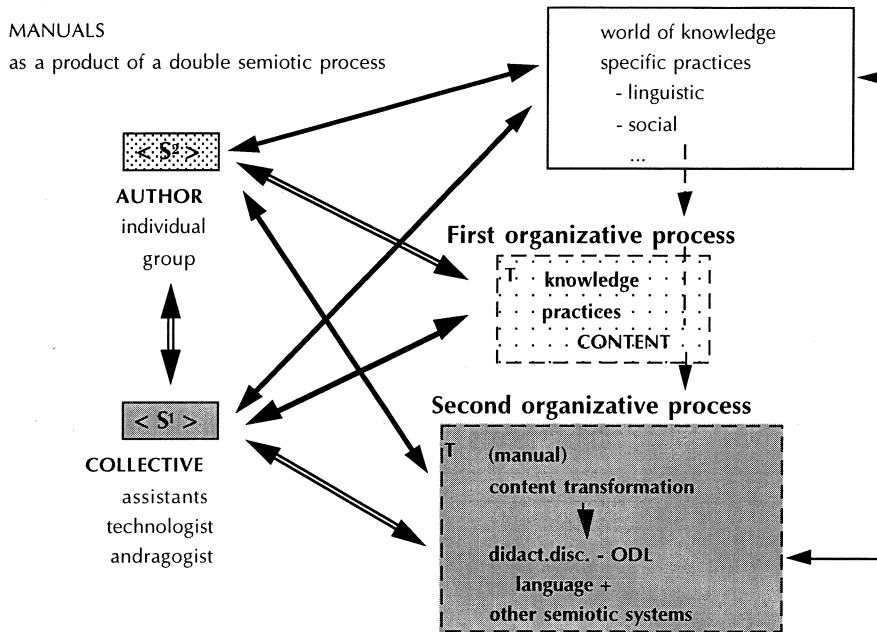
M. EMÍLIA RICARDO MARQUES
Universidade Aberta (Portugal)

PURPOSE

At Universidade Aberta, we work on a Open Distance Learning basis, structured as follows:



We are studying UniAb manuals (product of a double semiotic process), marked by three common communicative functions: DESCRIPTIVE (cognitive filtration) → convey factual information, conceptual referential knowledge – organized discourse; EXPRESSIVE (affective filtration) → ask for information about the learner: past experiences, preferences, judgements; SOCIOCOMMUNICATIVE (relational filtration) → control of communication, actions, behaviours, attitudes.



- **ODL manuals**, above all in the specific area of Educational Sciences, are considered **stereotypic scripts** in a very specific teaching / learning ritual / contract, so predeterminating content / expression, above all, of a specific category:

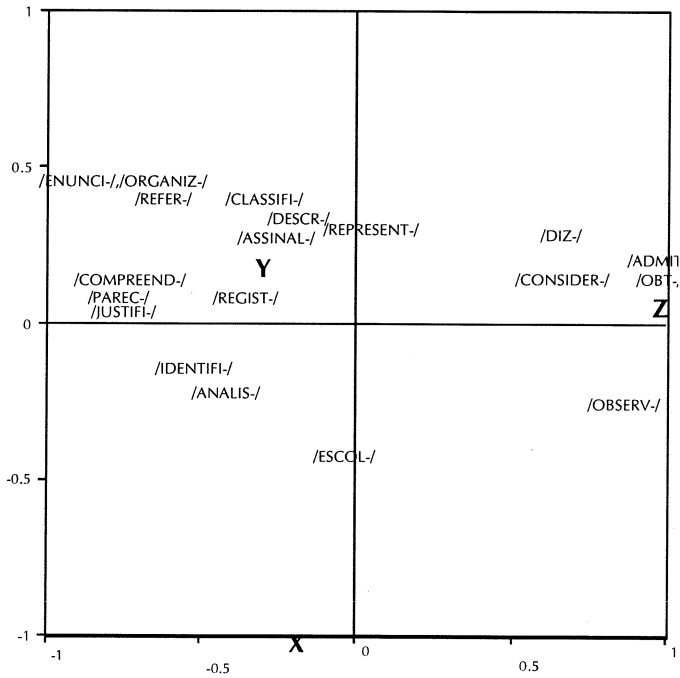
- **Stereotypical activities** and **particular types of interpersonal relationships** reflect constraints, strategies,..., represented by the authoring and group production, as distinctive features of **N** virtual distant learning processes, where certain knowledge objects are emphasized, the ones that those activities are centered on. These structured sequences present **PREDICATES** as relevant units, giving additional emphasis to perceptual strategies, interaction processes, etc.

METHOD

The texts were approached on a lexicometric basis – software from CNRS – INaLF – UMR9952: *Laboratoire de Lexicométrie et Textes politiques*. Discourse analysis has been made of the end of the first five chapters of three *Universidade Aberta* manuals, randomly chosen. Those closing parts (*ACTIVITIES*) are deconstructed into phrasal – segments, whose lexical poles have been taken (statistical techniques) as the most frequent content words æ *vd.* structuralism and deconstruction. We have therefore abandoned legibility methodological procedures and lexical density studies.

RESULTS

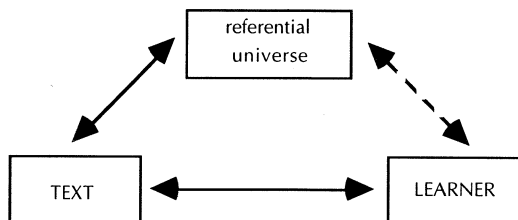
So, by factor analysis, we have determined



Let us now look at

1. the **dominant patterns of thought and of transactional mechanisms** (vd. reader – response theory, speech – act theory, ...)

TRANSACTIONAL MECHANISMS articulate three poles:



The **TEXT** is marked by PROPOSITIONAL CONTENT, as well as by ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE (representative,...) / MODALITIES: not only indicating the writer attitudes towards the state or event expressed, but trying to control the mental activity and the attitudes of the learner. Again, we have a complex of speech acts: directive, declarative, commissive, as well as representative.

2. **the learner's mental representations presupposed by authors**, after the learning mind has internalised certain data; these representations show the importance of speech act complexes, chosen as an object of research, for instance, TO ADMIT, TO ACHIEVE, TO UNDERSTAND. These forms force the implicit acknowledgment of propositional content and stress THE IMPORTANCE OF DIRECT DIRECTIVE ACTS. So, we have:

- **ADMITA** (20), *admitamos* (1), *vamos admitir* (12), *admitindo* (3): a complex of directive, constative, commissive, representative acts, where the author is commanding certain mental mechanisms, leading us to accept / acknowledge as true, not only the propositional content of the sentence, but also the future development of that content.
- **OBTER** (40), *obtenha* (32): a different complex of acts, because it aims at future, not controlled actions, though their are presupposed as certain. And that is why the author cannot assert that those actions, or their result, are either true or false.
- **COMPREENDER**: *compreende as razões de X / a necessidade de Y / a importância de Z / ...* In what concerns these last predicates, Claude Hagège remembers **the nominalized forms of adjectives** (*necessidade – necessário, importância – importante*), resuming information not to be discussed, *razões* not to be explained, but, above all, certainly, erasing the author's responsibility in the text.

CONCLUSIONS:

Confirming what we have already seen in foreign language manuals, two of our authors inscribe themselves in a stereotyped script dominated by a **logic of transmission** (P. Senge).

That script seems to determine, in a certain degree, the semantic interpretation, also because some of the most relevant units in the discourse stream emphasize a certain author *status*, defined in terms of [+ power, + knowledge, + control] over his future readers, the learners.

The results show, furthermore, discursive routines (commanding, controlling, ...) marked by a power that authors might not be aware of, but that shows their dominant position in the knowledge hierarchy. Hypotheses on how to deal with those phenomena, could be centered in the articulation of

TWO LEARNING PARADIGMS

Logic of	
transmission	appropriation
training	development
rules	practices
solutions	problems
motivation: seduction	motivation: by the need of surpassing one's own difficulties
knowledge memorizing	knowledge integration
PRIMACY: individualisation, autonomy, awareness, commitment	

TWO ARCHITECTURAL PROCESSES

	1	2
Context	standardised known predictable	diverse unknown surprising
Intervention	specified «snag free»	open / bottom – up problematic implementation
Outcome	material possible of being anticipated measurable on a comparative basis	intangible possible of being rationalised measurable on its own terms
PRIMACY	HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT	

REFERENCES

- Hagège, C. 1985. *L'homme de paroles*. Paris, Fayard.
 Senge, P. 1992. *The Fifth Discipline: the art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*. London, Century Business.