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A PROPOSAL FOR A METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DIGITAL MEME GENRE

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Abstract: The general objective of this work is to carry out a methodological analysis of the digital meme genre, through the application of genre analysis categories elaborated by Motta-Roth (2011) and others, articulated to theoretical aspects formulated by Bakhtin (2011). In this sense, the analysis undertaken here starts from the production conditions of the genre, to then contemplate its compositional structure, its thematic content and its style. As a research problem, the following question was proposed: how is the digital meme genre characterized, in view of its specific characteristics, such as production conditions, compositional structure, thematic content and style? To find possible answers to this question, initially, a bibliographical survey was carried out regarding genres, genres and multimodality and digital genres, with the consultation of authors such as Bakhtin (2011), Motta-Roth (2011), Marcuschi (2005) and Rojo and Barbosa (2015), among others. Then, several websites and social networks were consulted for the selection of memes and subsequent composition of the corpus; finally, the theoretical categories were applied to analyze the selected corpus. Thus, in methodological terms, the research can be defined as qualitative, applied in nature, with bibliographic procedures and the objective of describing and analyzing the corpus composed of digital memes, with thematic content focused on female empowerment.

Keywords: Genres. Digital Genres. Multimodality. Meme.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, an increasingly diversified scenario of social interaction is observed, with the increasing use of multimodal and media texts, causing a true innovation in the ways of relating through language. In this context, mediated by technological devices, many and varied digital genres circulate, among

which the meme stands out, as it is one of the favorites of users of social networks. The meme, recognized as a genre that engages in social criticism through humor, enables social agents to reflect and discuss certain issues, often controversial or thorny, in an always lighter and more fun way.

In this perspective, the present work has the general objective of carrying out a methodological analysis of the digital meme genre, through the application of genre analysis categories proposed by Motta-Roth (2011) and other authors, articulated to theoretical aspects formulated by Bakhtin (2011). In this sense, we seek to characterize the digital meme genre, considering its specific characteristics, such as production conditions, compositional structure, thematic content and style.

To this end, initially, a bibliographical survey was carried out regarding genres, genres and multimodality and digital genres. Then, websites and social networks were consulted for the selection of memes and subsequent composition of the *corpus*; finally, we set out to apply the theoretical categories for the analysis of the corpus.

The work was structured as described: it started with a theoretical review about genres, digital genres and multimodality; next, a methodological proposal for the analysis of digital genres is presented; finally, the meme genre is characterized in terms of its production conditions and two texts within this category are analysed.

AROUND DISCOURSE GENRES

Based on Bakhtin (2011), it is considered that genres are relatively stable types of utterances produced by language, in the most diverse situations of human activity. In a dialogical perspective, the notion that interlocutors, in verbal communication, select words according to the specificities of the genre they use is taken as a parameter,

and certain types of utterances are generated by a certain function (scientific, technical, official, daily, etc) and by certain conditions of communication, specific to each field.

To express themselves, subjects always use speech genres. In other words, all utterances have a standard and relatively stable way of structuring a whole. There is available to speakers of a language a rich repertoire of oral and written discursive genres that, in practice, are used with confidence and dexterity, even if the majority is totally unaware of their theoretical existence. (BAKHTIN, 2011, p. 301-302).

Reflecting on the social character of genres, Koch and Elias (2012) state that these are constituted, as socio-communicative practices, in a certain way and with a certain function, according to the spheres of action, which makes it possible to recognize and produce them whenever necessary. This is equivalent to considering that every genre is characterized by occurring in a certain sphere of human activity, under unique production conditions. Otherwise, still according to the authors, "there would be primacy of an individual and individualizing production, devoid of the traits of a socially constructed work, which would make the process of reading and understanding difficult" (KOCH; ELIAS, 2012, p. 106).

In this bias, it is emphasized that language fulfills a social function of extreme relevance. According to Marcuschi (2005, p.19), "textual genres are like socio-discursive entities and forms of social action that are unavoidable in any communicative situation". Thus, genres appear as forms of communication, meeting the needs of human expression, molded under influences of the historical and social context of the various spheres of human communication.

Returning to Bakhtin (2011), it is inferred that every genre is characterized and

differentiated from the others by virtue of at least three constitutive dimensions: the thematic content (or the contents that can be said through it); the global plan (or the compositional structure that the text assumes to meet the demands of communication) and the style (or the discursive, textual and linguistic configurations that it presents).

For a broader understanding of discursive genres, it is necessary to address the problem of the distinction between genre and textual types. According to Marcuschi (2008, p. 155), the concept of textual type, or typological sequence:

[...] designates a kind of theoretical construction (generally a sequence underlying the texts) defined by the linguistic nature of its composition (lexical and syntactic aspects, verb tenses, logical relations, style). In general, textual types cover about half a dozen categories known as: narration, argumentation, exposition, description, injunction.

Thus, in a single textual genre, such as a report, there may be more than one textual type (exposure, description, argumentation, etc.), articulating to form a global texture.

From the perspective of Marcuschi (2005), it is clear that genres are dynamic and can change over time to adapt to new audiences and new communicative needs. They can also disappear or differ from one region or one culture to another. The great technological development, for example, implied the emergence of new genres, which meet countless new communicative needs, whether in the sphere of work, politics, economics, leisure, interpersonal relationships, among many other spheres.

In the same sense, Bakhtin's conception of genre is not static, as it might seem at first sight. Marcuschi (2008) argues that, by conceptualizing genres as relatively stable types of utterances, Bakhtin sheds light on the unstable dimension of these social artifacts.

For this reason, given their eminently social nature, genres are subject to change, arising from social transformations and new procedures for organizing and finishing verbal architecture (KOCH; ELIAS, 2012).

Regarding the issue of support for genres, Maingueneau (2001, p. 71) postulates that “it is necessary to reserve an important place for the material manifestation of discourses, their support, as well as their mode of diffusion: oral statements, on paper, on the radio, on the computer screen, etc. Marcuschi (2008) adds that the support of a genre is understood as a physical or virtual locus with a specific format, which serves as a basis or environment for fixing the genre materialized as a text.

This materiality is unavoidable. Likewise, supports are neither formless nor uniform, but always appear in some specific format, such as a book, a magazine, a newspaper, a billboard, and so on. With this, discursive practices gain a new coating, as there is a technological imposition that causes subjects to be instigated to undertake a new form of interaction.

Marcuschi (2008) already reflected that the intensification of the use of writing required on the internet could also promote a change in the communicative modality. In a different context of social interactions, the need to use supports of a virtual nature prevails, since for digital genres, such as memes, emails, GIFs and many others, it is necessary to be in possession of devices such as cell phones, computers, tablets, equipped with the internet, connected to websites and digital applications. In the following, these issues will be addressed in greater detail.

DIGITAL GENRES AND MULTIMODALITY

As stated, digital information and communication technologies (TDIC) have brought innovations to interaction through language, as well as to different fields of knowledge and social interaction.

Rojo and Barbosa (2015, p. 108) state that “a multimodal or multisemiotic text is one that uses more than one language modality or more than one system of signs or symbols (semiosis) in its composition”. Two or more modalities of linguistic forms are used – verbal and non-verbal, and the conventional modes of production of meaning through writing are linked to visual, oral, gestural modes, among many other possible ones.

In textual multimodality, there is a multiplicity of languages evidenced through images, more present in printed texts, and the various semiotic and media resources, such as: icons, animations and videos, in addition to hypertexts, present in digital texts.

As defended by Rojo and Barbosa (2015), in such a technological society, permeated by digital instruments, the integration of semioses¹ and hypertext² it constitutes a guarantee of a space for authorship and interaction: the circulation of polyphonic discourses in the same cyberspace, with the distance of a click, designing new practices of literacy and hypermedia.

Thus, it is emphasized that in digital genres, highlighting the meme genre, there is a predominance of a mixed language, which carries marks of various languages that have access in society, such as the oral, imagery, iconographic language, among others., but written language, at different levels of formality, is also very present in cybernetic space. It is a language marked by hypertexts,

1 Semiosis is understood as the process of signification and production of meanings, capable of producing and generating signs, based on the premise that there is a reciprocal relationship between meaning and signifier (ROJO, 2016).

2 Hypertext is the text to which other sets of information are added in the form of blocks and texts, words, images or sounds, which are accessed through specific references, in the digital medium called hyperlinks (ROJO, 2016).

and interspersed with links, which allow its readers to make connections in all directions and return to the initial text at any time, redirecting their path. In this digital space, there are countless possibilities, both for production and reception of content.

According to Dionísio (2011, p. 139), in “contemporary society, the practice of writing literacy, of the verbal sign, must be incorporated to the practice of literacy of the image, of the visual sign”. The author points out that multimodality is a constitutive feature of both oral and written discourse, and that writing has presented “increasingly non-standard arrangements” due to technological development, which requires readers to modify their modes usual to read.

With the expansion of internet access, the social practices of reading and writing have changed, giving new contours to notions such as interaction, collaboration and participation. These changes re-signified not only such practices, but also promoted significant structural, collective and individual changes in the contemporary world, which encompass the multimodality described so far. As part of this “multimodal world”, technological/digital genres emerged.

According to Marcuschi (2005), it appears that, in the last two centuries, it was the new technologies, especially those linked to the area of communication, that led to the emergence of new genres:

Certainly, it is not exactly the technologies themselves that originated the genres, but the intensity of uses and their interference in daily communicative activities. Thus, the great technological supports of communication such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, the internet, for having a strong presence and great centrality in the communicative activities of the social reality that they help to create, will in turn provide and shelter quite characteristic new genres. Hence, new discursive forms emerge, such as editorials, feature articles,

news, phone calls, telegrams, telemessages, teleconferences, videoconferences, live reports, electronic letters (e-mails), virtual chats (chats), virtual classes (classes chats) and so on. (MARCUSCHI, 2005, p. 20).

It seems certain that these new genres are not absolute innovations, as they would hardly come into existence without being anchored in other existing genres, as Bakhtin (1997) had mentioned, when he dealt with the “transmutation” of genres and the assimilation of one genre by another., generating a new artifact.

Taking the theoretical considerations woven as a starting point, a methodological proposal for the analysis of digital genres is then presented.

DIGITAL GENRES: A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR ANALYSIS

The present proposal for a methodological analysis of gender begins with the description of the conditions of production of the genre, which involves reflection on questions such as: who are your interlocutors? Where and when is it produced? What are the purposes involved in its production? Which institution do you relate to? What social value is attributed to it and what results are obtained through its circulation? What is the support of each of them? Then, the analysis of the thematic content, compositional structure and style of the investigated genre is carried out.

In this line, it is considered that the elements of the text result from a certain social interaction and need to be described in terms of the elements of the context. According to Motta-Roth (2011), this description is necessary, in view of the local nature of the methodological perspectives used to study specific social practices, since each set of data related to a genre demands a tailor-made investigative approach.

In other words, for an analysis of genres, one must take into account the socio-historical conditions (time and space) and the set of agents inserted in its elaboration and circulation. It means to say that, at the moment of interaction, oral or written, a genre is used that, despite being inherent to each discursive situation, reveals the need of the participants involved in that situation, the will of the enunciator, the intention of the speaker.

In addition to production conditions, a broad understanding of a genre requires identifying and understanding its a) thematic content, b) its compositional structure and c) its style.

The thematic dimension of the genre contemplates the type of content that can be said through it.

The compositional structure corresponds to the global organization of the text, determined both by the genre and by other factors of the discourse production conditions. It covers questions such as: how many parts is a text divided into? What are these parts? How do they relate to each other? To understand the compositional form of a genre, it is also necessary to pay attention to the form of organization, the distribution of information and non-verbal elements, such as color, graphic pattern or typical layout, illustrations (KOCH; ELIAS, 2012).

The style refers to the expressive resources of the language that are selected by the speaker, among all the available resources, as they are the most adequate to the conditions of speech production, the purpose of the interlocution and the support of the genre. Each and every discursive genre has style; in some of them, there are more favorable conditions (literary genres), in others, less favorable (official documents, invoices), for the manifestation of individual style.

The investigation of style encompasses

discursive aspects, textual aspects and linguistic aspects.

The discursive aspects of style refer to the types of discourse (narration, description, injunction, argumentation, dissertation); to anchoring (the way in which the author introduces himself or places himself in/before the text, for example, in a personal way, using 1st. person pronouns and verbal inflections, letting his voice be heard or in an impersonal way, hiding the your voice); managing the different voices that need to be present in the text (which occur in excerpts like “according to so-and-so”, “from the point of view of”); to the modalization of discourse or the use of a certain way of saying that can attenuate or accentuate a statement, or else express/erase the author’s subjectivity, that is, mechanisms or linguistic marks that allow the author to construct a certain representation of himself for the text reader (KOCH; ELIAS, 2012).

The textual aspects of the style contemplate the mechanisms and linguistic resources (morphological, syntactic, prosodic, lexical) that ensure the cohesion and coherence of the text and allow the thematic progression; the textual organizers that structure the text, establishing connections between its parts or showing its divisions, and which can be temporal connectors (such as “at the beginning”, “in the first place”) and logical-argumentative connectors (such as “however”, “soon”, “therefore”, “even because”, etc.) (KOCH; ELIAS, 2012).

Linguistic aspects of style include typical or appropriate lexical choices for the communication situation that may have argumentative value; the use and maintenance of appropriate verb tenses for the gender; the choice of formal or informal registration; choosing the appropriate linguistic variety, which involves making decisions about the need to approach or depart from urban norms and prestige in the text; the use of

writing conventions, that is, punctuation, capitalization, correct spelling, paragraphing, etc. (KOCH; ELIAS, 2012).

ABOUT THE MEME GENRE: CHARACTERISTICS AND CONDITIONS OF PRODUCTION

The term meme derives from the Greek *mimeses* (imitation), and was proposed in 1976 by the biologist and writer Richard Dawkins. Based on concepts of evolutionary biology, the author defended the idea that just as a gene is a biological unit of information, the meme would be its cultural counterpart. In other words, this concept represents any and all information that can be apprehended and transmitted from person to person, “including habits, superstitions, beliefs, doctrines, theories – in short, any mental representation that depends on the limited resources of the human brain to survive. and spread” (TEIXEIRA, 2013).

For Silva, Francelino and Melo (2017, p. 178), the meme is in fact a discursive genre, as it is anchored in a space of creation and reception by real subjects, at the same time that it is dialogically composed of the new forms of interaction in the virtual space, above all, those present in the existing communication networks on the internet. Furthermore, it has the three specific components pointed out by Bakhtin (2011), appearing to have well-defined thematic content, style and compositional construction.

Thus, the meme genre has a relatively stable structure; it always deals with and/or refers to a social topic that is on the agenda (thematic content); finally, it carries and manifests, through hints of humor, the intentions of a given enunciator (style).

For Silva (2016, p. 342), memes came to be identified as a production composed “of images, figures, photographs, phrases, keywords or any other element that presents

an ironic or humorous content that spreads or spreads. replicate on the network”.

The meme can also be characterized as a genre that presents open circulation, since it is broadcast on social networks and other media, such as television, magazines, newspapers.

Analyzing from the perspective of multimodality, in the elaboration of a meme, producers can explore semiotic resources (static or moving images, colors, words, typography, speeches, etc.). On the other hand, it is necessary for readers to retrieve the clues provided for interpretation, which requires the mobilization of prior knowledge, the making of inferences, the perception of intertextual relationships, in addition to skills related to multiliteracies, which encompass inherent cultural dimensions to the texts and semiotic dimensions related to the effects of meaning arising from the choices of resources used in production.

According to Escalante’s (2016) observations, memes notably assume a role in the process of disseminating information and building knowledge, by carrying a range of references (intertextualities) to other entertainment products, cultural situations and social phenomena. and politicians. Therefore, understanding a meme “depends on knowing its rules and dynamics to produce meanings” (HORTA, 2015, p. 21).

This understanding requires knowledge of certain rules and the context of emission and reception, as well as the analysis of the communicative situation that configures the ways in which semioses are articulated in this type of text. Thus, semiotic resources, whether constant in static or moving memes, are considered part of the process of indictment of meanings and are not configured as random elements, as they come from choices made by the producer and guide interpretations.

ANALYZES

By way of illustration, the analysis of two texts categorized as memes is presented below.

The first text (Figure 1) performs the function of social criticism through humor, opposing the traditional sexist position that insists that a woman's place is in the kitchen. The thematic content, therefore, revolves around the critique of sexism, which is still so present in contemporary society.

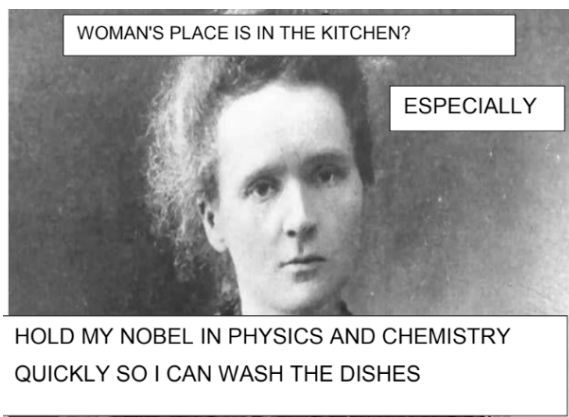


Figure 1 - Marie Curie meme

Source: pinterest.com/olhakiridinha

The character portrayed is the scientist Marie Curie (1903), her image being an element in the composition of the multimodal scenario, but it also evokes the memory of Maria Goeppert-Mayer (1963) and Donna Strickland (2018). The three scientists mentioned were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics, in periods that are distant from each other, confirming the thesis that a woman's place is where she wants to be, and not just in the kitchen.

(...) by awarding two inventions that are now used in medical applications, the Nobel shows the world that **science generates development** and life improvement. "The most interesting aspect of this award is the presence of Donna. In physics only two other women had been awarded, Marie Curie and Maria Goeppert-Mayer, both in nuclear physics. Donna, with her award in condensed matter physics, with an

important interdisciplinary component, breaks the 55-year fast without women at the Nobel Prize. It appears as a sign of new times. Women can now be protagonists in all spaces, including physics", she concludes. (ASCOM ABC, 2018).

Reflecting on the compositional structure of the meme under analysis, it is observed that the verbal language is in the form of a question and answer, characterized by the predominance of the injunctive textual typology. The question, which is addressed indistinctly to a diffuse interlocutor ("Is a woman's place in the kitchen?"), is answered ironically through a request ("Hold my Nobel Prize in Physics and Chemistry quickly so I can wash the dishes"), with the presence of the verb in the imperative mood and the expression in the diminutive, modalized, "quick". Verbal language only acquires meaning when articulated to the image of the scientist Marie Curie, which refers to women scientists who have already been awarded the prize.

Regarding the style, the injunctive typology predominates, marked by the presence of dialogue and the verb "to hold" in the imperative mood, as already highlighted. The textual sequence occurs linearly between the two utterances, composing its overall plan, contributing to the cohesion, coherence and thematic progression of the text. The choice of record is informal, close to orality ("pra eu lava"), marked by the lack of monitoring typical of a group of younger speakers. Finally, in the criticism of the sexist society, the presence of the voices of all women is observed, from a historical moment in which the struggle for equal rights between genders is observed.

In the second meme analyzed (Figure 2), the feminine position is also portrayed, through a profile of a well-resolved, decisive woman with a high dose of self-love. Underlying the verbal and non-verbal

language present in the text is the following reflection: is it really necessary to subject oneself to certain situations in order to have someone's company? It is known that Friday is usually the day of the week most desired and expected by the worker, as it opens the door to the weekend (rest, expectation of good times). Monday morning brings the memory of an entire week of battle ahead. Thus, the text appropriates this collective memory to make the subsequent analogy: why treat like Friday ("desired and expected") someone who treats you like Monday morning (read "rejected")? The thematic content, in this case, involves women's self-esteem.

week "Monday" and "Friday", in a relation of analogy to the treatment given to the people with whom one lives.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this work, the analysis of two texts, categorized as memes, that address the theme of female empowerment, was presented, adopting a methodological proposal that takes as a starting point the conditions of production of the genre and the fundamental elements, namely: thematic content, compositional structure and style.

The importance of understanding the existing relationship between society and language was addressed here. Any human action, whatever it may be, starts from interaction through language. In this sense, it was observed that in recent years there has been a popularization of access to the Internet and social networks, which, in a way, contributes to the emergence of digital genres.

Thus, analyzing memes that circulate on social networks was also a way of understanding how society has been behaving, what it has been questioning and how it has sought to express its positions and criticisms, whether of a political, economic or cultural nature.



Figure 2 - Diva depression

Source: Facebook.com/Divadepressão

Regarding the compositional structure, he perceives the relationship of harmony and complementarity between verbal language and non-verbal language. The image that appears in the foreground is that of a Hollywood actress, a true "diva", in a reflective posture.

As for the style, the injunctive typology predominates, in the form of advice, suggestion, marked by the presence of the verbal expression "do not treat" in the imperative mood. The register used is also informal, close to orality, as can be seen from the figurative use of the days of the

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