

Hybrid Discursive Genres in the Hypermedia Era / *Gêneros discursivos híbridos na era da hipermídia*

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ABSTRACT

The future plurality of discursive genres was emphasized by Bakhtin. For him, the discursive genres tend to grow as the spheres of human praxis develop and become complex. Due to this anticipation already announced by Bakhtin, the purpose of this paper is to extend the notion of discursive genres for occurrences in digital social networks, baptizing them as hybrid genres, given the fact that in the web, the strictly verbal discourse leaks the borders not only of the typical linearity of verbal language, in hypertext, but also of the exclusivity of verbal discourse in its mixtures with all forms of fixed and moving images and also with sound, music, noise, and speech, in multimedia.

KEYWORDS: Discursive Genres; Hypertext; Hypermedia; Hybrid Genres

RESUMO

A pluralidade em devir dos gêneros discursivos foi enfatizada por Bakhtin. Para ele, os gêneros do discurso tendem a crescer à medida que se desenvolvem e se complexificam as esferas da práxis humana. Em função dessa antecipação já anunciada por Bakhtin, o objetivo deste artigo é ampliar a noção de gêneros discursivos para as manifestações que ocorrem nas redes sociais digitais, batizando esse gênero de híbrido, dado o fato de que, nas redes, a discursividade estritamente verbal vaza as fronteiras não só da linearidade típica do verbo, no hipertexto, quanto também da exclusividade do discurso verbal nas misturas que este estabelece com todas as formas das imagens fixas e em movimento e com as linguagens sonoras, do ruído, à oralidade e à música, na multimídia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Gêneros discursivos; Hipertexto; Hipermídia; Gêneros híbridos*

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No one can doubt that, since the emergence of digital culture in the years 1980-90, and ever more increasingly, we have been immersed in interactive environments of a dialogical nature.

Digital technology in general and digital network, which we call the Internet, in particular, mediating the use, for example, of mobile phones and electronic tablets, as well as a lot of programs (apps) and forms of communication and digital information, such as social networks or blogs, all of them have changed the possibilities of interaction of thousands of people at the political, economic, cultural, industrial levels, and especially at the level of everyday life (CAPURRO, 2013, p.8).¹

Never as much as now, Bakhtin's dialogical theory has been so present and relevant. In a previous work (MITTERMEYER; SANTAELLA, in press), we studied, in the light of Bakhtin's dialogism, the main devices offered to the user by the Facebook platform. They are: *like*, *comment*, and *share*. *Like* means to approve the published information and to follow its unfolding by means of the Notifications device. *Comment* allows adding a comment that may contain a text and links to other sites, texts, images, videos. *Share* allows the user to disclose some information, causing it to move and spread throughout the platform and the web in general.

As a primordial trait of communication processes in the web, interactivity reaches its climax in digital social networks and games. Although Bakhtin has chosen the novel as the privileged locus of dialogism, its concepts, such as heteroglossia, dialogism and polyphony lend themselves to perfection for the analysis of interactivity in digital social networks.

Heteroglossia is defined by Bakhtin (2010)² as the coexistence, confrontation and even conflict between different voices. In the case of Facebook, heteroglossia is felt more strongly when agreements and disagreements are juxtaposed without the predominance of one over the other. Dialogism is interactive communication in which each one sees and recognizes him/herself through the other. Dialogism is dialogue in act, how different people relate, how movement between the self and the other is

¹ Text in original: "A tecnologia digital, em geral, e a rede digital, que chamamos de internet, em particular, mediando o uso, por exemplo, da telefonia móvel e os tablets eletrônicos, assim como a grande quantidade de programas (apps) e de formas de comunicação e informação digitais, como são as redes sociais ou os blogs, têm alterado as possibilidades de interação de milhares de pessoas a nível político, econômico, cultural, industrial e, sobretudo, no nível da vida diária".

² BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of the Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010, p.60-102. [University of Texas Press Slavic Series; n. 8].

accomplished. In Facebook, dialogism becomes crystal clear when the user posts a message and this triggers discursive reactions in the other participants. Polyphony is the supreme form of dialogism, as defined by the cohabitation and interaction, in the same space, of a multiplicity of voices. This process manifests itself in Facebook when the user receives feedback from other users and diverse voices come together in a constructive dialogue. When the matter is subject to controversy, it is not uncommon that polyphony turns into cacophony.

1 Dialogism in Discursive Genres

It is known that Bakhtin expanded the concept of dialogism to the field of communicative genres of discursive processes. According to Machado (2005, p.152), he did not conceive of discursive genres as a classification of species, but as a form of dialogism that takes place in communication processes. The “prosaic practices that different uses of language make of discourse,”³ offer it as a manifestation of plurality in itself. “By giving value to the study of genres,” dialogism functions as “an excellent resource to 'x-ray' hybridity, heteroglossia and the plurality of sign systems of culture” (MACHADO, 2005, p.153).⁴ Machado also reminds us of the fact that “precisely because they emerge in the prosaic realm of language, discourse genres include all sorts of everyday dialogues and utterances of public, institutional, artistic, scientific and philosophical life (2005, p.155).”⁵

Keeping this in view, Machado (2005, p.155) refers to the two main types of genres raised by Bakhtin: primary and secondary. Far from being mutually exclusive, they are complementary. The former refers to everyday communication. The second, to the communication produced by elaborate cultural codes, such as writing. Thus, novels, journalistic genres, philosophical essays etc. are included in the second type of genre. They are “complex formations because they are elaborations of cultural communication

³ Text in original: “práticas prosaicas que diferentes usos de linguagem fazem do discurso”.

⁴ Text in original: “Ao valorizar os estudos dos gêneros”, [...] “um excelente recurso para ‘radiografar’ o hibridismo, a heteroglossia e a pluralidade de sistemas de signos da cultura”.

⁵ Text in original: “exatamente porque surgem na esfera prosaica da linguagem, os gêneros discursivos incluem toda sorte de diálogos cotidianos bem como enunciações da vida pública, institucional, artística, científica e filosófica”.

processes organized in specific systems such as science, art and politics”⁶(p.155). The growing plurality of discursive genres is emphasized by Bakhtin himself:

The wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because in 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, 2010, p.60).⁷

Due to this anticipation already promoted by Bakhtin, the purpose of this article is to expand the notion of speech (or discursive) genres to the manifestations that occur in digital social networks, baptizing this kind of discourse as hybrid, given the fact that in the networks, the strictly verbal discourse leaks the boundaries not only of the typical linearity of verbal language, in hypertext, as well as the exclusivity of verbal discourse in the mixtures that it establishes with all forms of fixed and moving images, and with all kinds of sound such as noise, orality, and music, in multimedia.

2 Digital Literacy and Hypermedia

It is noteworthy that the path to the above stated proposal was duly opened by Brait (2006, p.12-13) and Machado as well (2005, p.163; 165). To Brait, discursive peculiarities point to broader contexts including extralinguistic ones. This allows “to scrutinize semantic fields, to describe and analyze syntactic micro and macro organizations, and also to recognize, to recover and to interpret discursive marks and articulations which characterize discourses and indicate their constitutive heterogeneity, as well as the heterogeneity of the subjects there present.”⁸

Machado advances the same idea when she states that the discursive genres also invade “the language of communication, whether of rites or of technological mediations.”⁹ From the point of view of dialogism, urban polyphony, for example, results of discursive genres marked by diversity: traffic signs, ads, street signs and

⁶ Text in original: “complex formations because they are elaborations of cultural communication processes organized in specific systems such as science, art and politics”.

⁷ See footnote 2.

⁸ Text in original: “esmiuçar campos semânticos, descrever e analisar micro e macroorganizações sintáticas, reconhecer, recuperar e interpretar marcas e articulações enunciativas que caracterizam o(s) discurso(s) e indicam sua heterogeneidade constitutiva, assim como a dos sujeitos aí instalados”.

⁹ Text in original: “as linguagens da comunicação, seja dos ritos ou das mediações tecnológicas”.

business houses as well as radio, television and digital media “so as to reproduce basic programmed genres such as journalism, advertising, music video, cartoons, slogans, banners, jingles and vignettes.”¹⁰ From this, Machado proposes that speech genres can be considered from an ontogenetic and phylogenetic point of view. The former takes place in the interactions produced in the sphere of verbal communication. The latter expands to “other spheres of communication which are made possible thanks to the dynamics of other cultural codes.”¹¹

Following Machado, I propose that discursive hybridization reaches its apex in the environments of digital social networks. It is well remembered by Machado (2005, p.164) that “the environment is the condition without which the dialogue just does not happen.”¹² Now it is known that social networks constitute programmed virtual environments able to promote dialogue at its highest degree of intensification.

In these environments, what prevails is discursive hybridization which has been called “digital literacy” or “information literacy.” (SOARES, 2002, p.151) called attention to the emerging digital literacy, i.e., “a certain *state* or *condition* that users acquire when they appropriate the new digital technology and exercise practices of reading and writing on the screen. This is dissimilar to the *state* or *condition* - literacy – of the performing practices of reading and writing on paper.”¹³ Although this statement is acute, the author seems to be referring merely to the verbal text, without having taken into consideration the fact that since the mid-1990s, graphical user interfaces already populated the networks and the users’ navigation processes with graphics, pictures, diagrams and routes that were not exclusively verbal.

A few years after Soares (2002), Santos (2006, p.81) pointed to information literacy, audiovisual, technological, and multimedia literacy which are required for the interaction in digital networks. “Information literacy [...] requires literacy in the traditional sense (to read and to write verbally), but also visual literacy (reading and writing visual messages), an audiovisual literacy (ability to read and write audiovisual

¹⁰ Text in original: “para reproduzir os gêneros básicos da programação como jornalismo, publicidade, videoclipe, charges, *slogans*, *banners*, *gingles* e vinhetas”.

¹¹ Text in original: “outras esferas da comunicação realizada graças à dinâmica de outros códigos culturais”.

¹² Text in original: “o ambiente é a condição sem a qual o diálogo simplesmente não acontece”.

¹³ Text in original: “um certo *estado* ou *condição* que adquirem os que se apropriam da nova tecnologia digital e exercem práticas de leitura e de escrita na tela, diferente do *estado* ou *condição* – do letramento – dos que exercem práticas de leitura e de escrita no papel”.

messages), and even computer skills.”¹⁴ Eshet (2004 *apud* COLL et al., 2010) went even further in his consideration of the complexity involved by digital media. Digital literacy to Eshet,

is a special way of thinking, a mindset with a photovisual component (photovisual literacy), related to reading visual representations; a component of reproduction (reproduction literacy), related to creative recycling of existing materials; one component of branched thought (branching literacy), related to hypermedia and lateral thinking; an informational component (information literacy), related to the ability to intelligently evaluate and use information; and a socio-emotional component (socio-emotional literacy), related to the ability to share information and conduct collaborative learning through the use of communication tools and digital platforms (COLL et al., 2010, p.299).¹⁵

To do justice to the richness of discursive semiotic hybridity, which is present in the dialogues mediated by the relationship platforms, I have preferred to use the term “hypermedia” in place of “digital literacy” or “information.” I think that “hypermedia,” from the output, frees us from any residue of “language centrism.” The English term “literacy” is already sufficiently marked by a linguistic bias. When translated into Portuguese, “letramento,” its meaning is further marked by the verbal bias. Far from this bias, the complexity of signs in digital networks, both in the social network sites and in the action of navigating through information networks, is entirely new, bringing with it a discursive genre eminently hybrid, that is, hypermedia.

3 Hypermedia Hybridity

Hypermedia mix hypertext with multimedia. The prefix *hyper* on *hypertext* refers to the text ability to store information that is fragmented into a plurality of parts

¹⁴ Text in original: “A alfabetização informacional [...] requer uma alfabetização no sentido tradicional (saber ler e escrever verbalmente), mas também uma alfabetização visual (saber ler e escrever mensagens visuais), uma alfabetização audiovisual (saber ler e escrever mensagens audiovisuais) e ainda competências informáticas”.

¹⁵ Text in original: “é um modo especial de pensar, uma mentalidade (mindset) com um componente fotovisual (photo-visual literacy), relacionado à leitura de representações visuais; um componente de reprodução (reproduction literacy), relacionado à reciclagem criativa de materiais existentes; um componente de pensamento ramificado (branching literacy), relacionado à hipermídia e ao pensamento lateral; um componente informacional (information literacy), relacionado à capacidade para avaliar e utilizar inteligentemente a informação; e um componente socioemocional (socio-emotional literacy), relacionado à capacidade para compartilhar informações e realizar aprendizagens colaborativas mediante o uso de ferramentas e plataformas de comunicação digital”.

arranged in a reticular structure. Through the associative and interactive actions of the receiver, these parts will join, transmuting into virtual versions that are possible due to the non-sequential and multidimensional structure of the hypertext.

Several authors have called attention to the fact that traditional encyclopedias already presented orientation tools which are similar to the current hypertext ones. Such is also the structure of dictionaries, glossaries, indexes, thesauruses, atlases, frames of signals, summaries, and references at the end of articles. In digital form, however, research on indices, the uses of orienting instruments, the passage from one node to another takes place in fractions of seconds.

This happens because the computer can retrieve information from any part of its memory at high speed. With such access speed it is easy to jump from one page to another, from a first page to the last one, from a page in a document to another page in another document. In less than a heartbeat, any element stored digitally can be accessed at any time and in any order. The nonlinearity is a property of the digital world and the master key of this discontinuity is called hyperlink, i.e., the connection between two points in the digital space, a special connector that points to other available information which is the essential enabler of the hypertext.

Instead of being structured linearly, sentence by sentence as in a printed book, what hypertext features is a text which is characterized by nodes or points of intersection. When they are clicked, they send to nonlinear connections, composing a reading journey that jumps from one point to another of messages which are disposed in separate documents, but able to be interconnected. This is exactly what is implied in a reticular configuration.

The explanation sounds complicated, but it is exactly what the user does when he/she reads a document in the web, when one clicks at underlined or colored words to obtain information that is located in other documents. Thus, the structure of the hypertext is multilinear; it passes from one point of information to another with a mere and instant click or tap, as it is the case of i-Pads and tablets. The structure is also interactive as hypertext involves the user-reader manipulation. The structure is composed according to the clicks and paths that one chooses to follow or not. In such a system, the concepts of writing and text suffer substantial changes. Although a textual element can be further isolated, the whole system is primarily interactive and open whose messages are in a continuously variable circuit.

Multimedia, in turn, consists of the hybridization, that is, the mixture of sign processes, codes and media. Unfortunately, little has been remembered about the substantial changes in the evolution of human languages which were introduced by the digital world and manifested in inseparable mixtures between the verbal, visual and audible. Cyberspace appropriates and mixes, without limitation, all pre-existing systems of signs and genres: textual narrative, thesaurus, comics, cartoons, theater, film, dance, architecture, urban design, etc. In this hybrid sign mesh, something new is born. Without losing its link with the past, it emerges with its own identity, that is, multimedia, which is responsible for what this paper is proposing under the concept of hybrid discourse genres. This requires conceiving of discourse as necessarily multi and hypermedia.

When the user pushes the button of the computer and begins to manipulate any large or small interface to which one has access today, what is it that appears and slides through the screens? A flood of the most distinctive types of moving and reagent signs that are sensitive to the interventions of the user. The screens are filled with guiding signals, pictures, photos, drawings, animations, sounds and certainly distinct species of words, captions, and texts. These appearances depend on the interactivity of the user-agent who connects information through links.

When it merges with multimedia, hypertext becomes hypermedia, that is, nodes that refer to other documents are no longer exclusively textual, but lead to photos, videos, music, etc. It is a dense and complex mixture of signs made of multimedia hyper-syntaxes which are populated by mathematical symbols, notations, diagrams, figures, and also peopled with voices, music, sounds and noises. This opens a new way of configuring information in a thickness of meanings that are not restricted to verbal language, but are constructed by the kinship and contagion of signification arising from the multiple possibilities offered by sound, visual and verbal discourses. This seems to harbor the hypothesis that in the roots of all possible mixtures of languages there are always three main matrices: verbal, visual and sound, in all the variations that each performs, as advocated in the book *Matrizes da linguagem e pensamento. Sonora, visual, verbal* [Matrices of language and thought] (SANTAELLA, 2001).

Therefore, from the merging of hypertext structure with multimedia, hypermedia springs. To understand it, one needs to go from the surface of digital media into their interiors where one encounters a plethora of highly complex signs and a mixture of languages of the most diversified genres and species which, from the moment the

computer has hosted them, came to be called hypermedia. And when the WWW, the graphical user interface was incorporated into the web, hypermedia has become its proper language, one that is woven of a multiplicity, heterogeneity and diversity of signs which coexist in the formation of a semiotic reality which is distinct from the preexisting forms of discourse.

Therefore, hypermedia is composed of clusters of multimedia information (word, sound and image) of non-sequential access, navigable by semi-random keywords. Thus, the ingredients of hypermedia are images, sounds, texts, animations and videos that can be connected in various combinations, breaking with the idea of a linear text with a beginning, middle and end in a pre-determined and fixed order. The multiple multimedia appearances which compete in the attention of the recipient and are accessible via hyperlinks, create a heterogeneous space consisting of programming layers performed at every click on the mouse of a computer or at one's finger touch on the tablet. The different pages of a hypermedia gain the attention of the receiver by the interpenetration, juxtaposition and multiplication of the previous page in the next page. Displacement constitutes the operative strategy of hypermedia whose features create an entirely new visual space.

Thus, the control of discontinuities, inasmuch as the user moves in the hypermedia space, is performed by his/her mind which develops new perceptual and cognitive competences that are peculiar to a new type of reader, the one that emerged with the digital world: the immersive reader. As I have already analyzed in other occasions (SANTAELLA, 2004; 2013), the immersive reader entails very distinct perceptual-cognitive skills which are different from those that are employed when reading a printed text. This latter implies a reader that follows the sequence of a text turning pages and handling volumes. On the other hand, the new immersive skills are also different from those employed when viewing images or seeing films and television. The immersive reader practices at least four navigation strategies: (a) To scan the screen, in a process of recognition of the field; (b) To browse, following clues until the target is found; (c) To search, or strive to find the target one has in mind; (d) To follow the clue "read more," exploring in-depth information, toward a more specialized source.

This kind of reader is called immersive because, in the informational space, he/she wanders and lingers on screens and reading programs, in a universe of evanescent and continuously available signs. Cognitively on standby, this reader connects between nodes and links, following multilinear, multi sequential and

labyrinthine routes that he/she helps to build in the process of interaction, moving across text, images, documents, music, video, etc. Jumping or surfing from one fragment to another, the reader is free to establish the aimed information. It is true that nowadays networks are being populated by powerful browsers that convey what one wants, without having to navigate in searching processes.

Moreover, in recent years, the changes in digital culture and the acceleration of these changes are dizzying, especially due to the emergence of mobile devices. So much so that, in that short time, an even newer type of reader emerged whom I baptized as the ubiquitous reader (SANTAELLA, 2013, p.277-284), a designation that is already appearing also to other researchers of digital culture, which only proves its undeniable presence.

It is in the spaces between hypermobility, i.e. physical mobility, fused to the mobility of information in networks, that the ubiquitous reader develops a unique cognitive profile that incorporates characteristics of the immersive player, but adds to them the contingency of being able to access information and exchange messages from anywhere to anywhere at any time.

This reader is ubiquitous because he/she is continuously situated in the interfaces of two simultaneous presences: the physical and the virtual. These interfaces reinvent the body architecture, the use of urban space and the complex relationships in the ways of living, which produce repercussions in the spheres of work and entertainment, in the spheres of services and market, in the exchange of information, and last but not least in the sphere of knowledge transmission and learning. For this type of reader, the hybrid system of signs remains the hypermedia, which is the digital system of signs *par excellence* and which is not limited to programs and products.

It is, in fact, a new configuration of the human communication media and sign production, as well as books, newspapers, cinema, radio, TV, and video have been and remain with their own configurations. It is a hybrid, dynamic system of signs that substantially alters the condition of the reader who becomes a co-creator of messages that are constructed through his/her interaction. In addition, current platforms such as blogs, social networks - and even wikis - allow the old readers to be converted into producers and promoters of their own discourse. The fundamental trait of this new kind of discourse genre is that, besides being hybrid, it puts in the user's hands the fate of his/her navigations and wanderings through networks, his/her exchanges and shares in dialogue. It is, therefore, a discourse genre that makes each participant responsible for

what he/she wants to expose of him/herself to the other, and for what he/she wants to keep silent about his/her privacy, although there seems to be no escaping, when cameras and street views may invade the privacy even of those who prefer to retreat in his/her discretion. In short, the complexities of the ambivalences and contradictions in the human communicative processes have never been more evident than now.

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