EFL TEACHERS' DISCOURSE AT ORKUT: AGENCY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS AND STRUCTURATION THEORY

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RESUMO: Com base na Lingüística Sistêmico-Funcional e na Teoria da Estruturação, exploramos o conceito de agência no discurso de professores de inglês como LE em um fórum online no Orkut. Procuramos revelar ideologias materializadas nas postagens dos professores e ilustrar como características sociais dialogam com o discurso. Focalizamos o tópico '*bad student*' em termos de transitividade – para estabelecer papéis de professores e alunos, e em termos da Teoria da Estruturação – visando a examinar interconexões desse discurso com práticas sociais, prescrições identitárias e estrutura social. Os resultados revelam a manutenção de práticas e papéis sociais, em que o professor continua sendo a figura principal.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: transitividade; agência; teoria da estruturação; discurso de professores de inglês como LE; contexto social

ABSTRACT: *Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics and Structuration Theory, we explore the concept of agency in EFL teachers' discourse in an online community forum at Orkut. Our analysis attempts to unveil ideologies materialized in EFL teachers' posts and to illustrate how social features interact with discourse. We focus on the topic 'bad student' regarding transitivity choices – to establish teachers' and learners' roles, and regarding Structuration Theory – to examine interconnections of this discourse with social practices, role prescriptions and social structure. The analysis reveals the maintenance of practices and roles where the teacher continues to be the main social participant.*

KEY WORDS: *transitivity; agency; structuration theory; EFL teachers' discourse; social context*

1. Text and context

Every text – that is, "any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:3) – is bi-directionally related to a given context (Halliday, 1999). This means that texts simultaneously influence and are influenced by the contexts where they are produced and used, and, consequently, understanding such interdependence is paramount for discourse analysis.

The importance of context in the production and reception of any text was defended by Malinowski more than sixty years ago, who coined the term *context of situation,* referring to

> "the situation in which words are uttered" and claiming that it "can never be passed over as irrelevant to the linguistic expression, [because**]** 'the meaning of any single word is to a very high degree dependent on its context'" (1946: 307, apud Eggins, 2004: 88).

Malinowski's claims have been highly influential in the development of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Systemic-Functional linguists explain the relation of text and context as one of realization: each level (as shown in Figure 1) is realized or encoded by the next level, from the most abstract – the context of culture – to the most concrete – lexicogrammar and phonology (Matthiessen, 1995; Halliday, op,.cit; Martin and Rose, 2003; Eggins, 2004; Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004).

Thus, the context of culture is realized by the context of situation, which in turn is realized by the semantics, realized by the lexicogrammar (the last level of the strata – phonology is related to spoken texts and will not be covered in this paper).
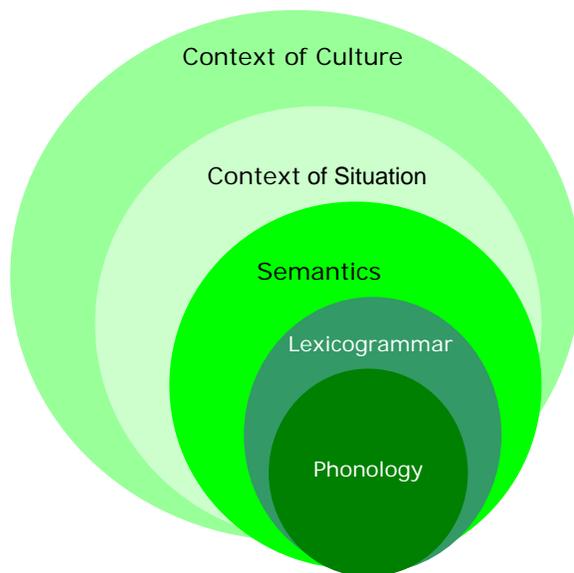
Figure 1 – Stratification level according to SFL (adapted from Halliday and Matthiessen, op.cit.)

While there has been extensive research on the context of situation – or *register* – there is a need for systematic investigation on the outer context and its relation to broad social conditions. This need has also been pointed out by Systemic-Functional linguists, especially by Hasan, who calls the attention to the fact that

> "(…) instead of becoming an explanatory principle, the notion of context has become an a-theoretical appendage which functions as a mere trouble shooter, a disambiguator of ambiguous sentences" (1999: 220).

In this paper, we use principles from Systemic Functional Linguistics and aspects of Giddens's Structuration Theory as tools to understand inter-relations between language and the social context is manifested in the text we analyze.

More specifically, we explore the concept of agency in EFL teachers' discourse in an online community forum at Orkut, in an attempt to unveil ideologies materialized in EFL teachers' posts and to illustrate how social features interact with discourse.

We analyze a topic named 'bad student' in terms of transitivity choices – to establish teachers' and learners' roles, and in terms of three broad dimensions of Structuration Theory – to examine interconnections

of this discourse with social practices, role prescriptions and social structure.

2. Context of investigation

New forms of interaction in electronic environments, such as online forums – features of late modernity and its complex societies – have triggered researchers' attention to electronic discourse in the cyberspace, regarding, for instance, the establishment of new communities, new identities and social relations (Heberle, 2005; Meneses, 2004, Santiago, in preparation).

Among the prospective objects of investigation, there is the discourse materialized in posts in blogs[1] and discussion forums. Due to its potential as a creative social practice as well as an informal manner of interaction, this discourse allows participants to externalize their ideology more freely, making the available data relevant for analysis of how interactants position themselves and other people as actors in specific social practices.

In this paper we focus on the issue of agency on one discussion forum in a virtual community of the relationship website Orkut. Orkut is an Internet social network service created by Google[2], in January, 2004, and named after its creator, Google employee Orkut Büyükkökten (Wikipaedia; Hempell, 2004; Meneses, 2004), whose objective has been to help users **"**maintain existing relationships with pictures and messages, and establish new ones by reaching out to people you've never met before" as well as "reconnect with old school mates" (Orkut.com)**.** Orkut also "makes it easy to find people who share your hobbies and interests" (ibid).

The website was originally developed to be a closed social circle, and new members could only join it by invitation from existing members. However, after six months it had more than 1,000,000

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[1] According to Wikipedia: A **weblog**, usually shortened to **blog**, is a website where regular entries are made (such as in a journal or diary) and presented in reverse chronological order. Blogs often offer commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. Most blogs are primarily textual although many focus on photographs, videos or audio.The first blogs were known as "online diaries", and started in 1994. The term "weblog" itself was coined by Jorn Barger, on 17 December 1997.

[2] Google is a worldwide famous search engine site.

members, and on January 22, 2007, this number had increased to over 40.42 million (Wikipedia).

Among the causes of the increase are the number of bogus, cloned, fake, invisible and "orphaned" profiles, which can serve as means of submitting advertisement of inappropriate content as well as the possibilities of visiting profiles without being detected[3], and the recent change which now permits users to create accounts without an invitation (Wikipedia). The outstanding expansion is most visible in Orkut´s popularity in Brazil, which is claimed to account for more than 60% of users.

After Orkut members sign in, they fill in a profile – either true or fake – which will be accessible to other users. The profile may include information related to personal preferences, work interests, in addition to an individual picture as well as up to twelve photos in an album[4] (Hempell, op.cit; Meneses, op.cit). The amount of information provided is optional and users can also choose if this information will be accessible only to people on their friends' list or to any visitor.

Besides allowing users to gather friends in their contact lists as well as sending messages in their scrapbooks[5], Orkut enables members to join discussion communities or create new ones according to shared interests. The choice of available communities to be joined is myriad, varying from the ones dedicated to honor musical groups to political debate or personal taste, and the number of new communities increases exponentially. The existing communities are classified by the website in the following categories[6]:

Communities categories

Activities	Family & Home	Music
Alumni & Schools	Fashion & Beauty	Pets & Animals
Arts & Entertainment	Food, Drink & Wine	Recreation & Sports
Automotive	Games	Religion & Beliefs
Business	Gay, Lesbian & Bi	Romance & Relationships
Cities & Neighborhoods	Government & Politics	Schools & Education
Company	Health, Wellness & Fitness	Science & History

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[3] Users can configure the setting in their profiles so that their visits are not detected; however, they will not be able to visualize the visits they received as well. An alternative has been the creation of fake profiles.

[4] Since February 2007, Orkut has allowed users to upload videos from youtube and google videos to their profiles.

[5] Page of personal messages which can be viewed by any Orkut user; users who do not wish their messages to be read can delete them.

[6] Retrieved from www.orkut.com on March 5, 2007

Computers & Internet	Hobbies & Crafts	Travel
Countries & Regional	Individuals	Other
Cultures & Community		

Figure 2.1 – Communities categories shown in Orkut

Although for a considerable number of members, belonging to a community is more related to building one's identity than to interest in discussing issues related to a specific topic (Meneses, 2004), there are communities which, indeed, present constant participation in the discussion forum.

These communities are considered virtual social gatherings that have boundaries which are not geographic but related to interests in common, especially "when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993).

For the present paper we chose the community *English Language Teachers*, part of the category Cultures & Community (Figure 2.1). It was created on May 22, 2004, and since then, more than 11,000 people have joined it.

This community claims to be "the very first ELT Community in Orkut", and it is dedicated to sharing thoughts, information, ideas, making friends or practicing English, the *lingua franca*. *English Language Teachers* fulfills the requirements which computer-mediated-communication (CMC) needs to comply with to be considered a virtual settlement hosting a virtual community (Jones, 1997):

a) to hold a minimum level of interactivity;
b) to have a variety of communicators;
c) to maintain a minimum level of sustained membership; and
d) to be a virtual common-public-space where a significant portion of interactive group-CMCs occur.

Although it is not possible to present a precise Figure, it can be estimated from a first analysis of the topics posted and the replies they obtain that the vast majority of the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers are from Brazil, or at least, teach in Brazil.

The topics posted, although subject to monitoring, are not the responsibility of the community owner, who proposes the community design but does not model nor entirely controls the discussions (Meneses, 2004). These discussions can vary from advice on material to complaints about working conditions or students' behavior.

In this paper we analyze how agency is discursively attributed to students and teachers in the topic – already mentioned – entitled 'bad students'[7], where five EFL teachers discuss 'the best way to teach badly behaving adolescent students'. Here is a copy of the text taken from the community page:

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[7] http://www.orkut.com/CommMsgs.aspx?cmm=67884&tid=12194563, accessed on November, 2006.

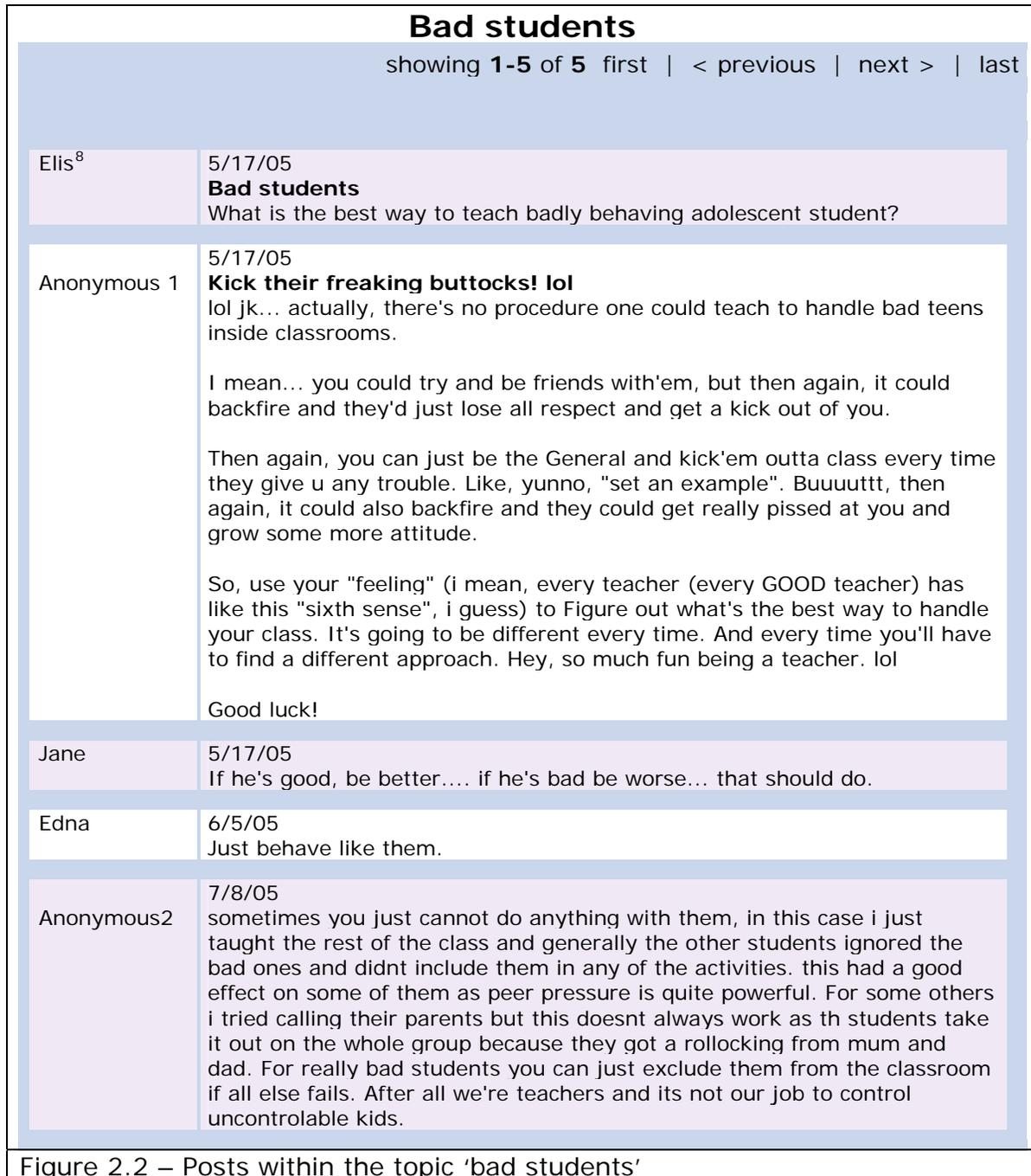|	
Bad students	
	showing **1-5** of **5** first | < previous | next > | last
Elis[8]	5/17/05 **Bad students** What is the best way to teach badly behaving adolescent student?
Anonymous 1	5/17/05 **Kick their freaking buttocks! lol** lol jk... actually, there's no procedure one could teach to handle bad teens inside classrooms. I mean... you could try and be friends with'em, but then again, it could backfire and they'd just lose all respect and get a kick out of you. Then again, you can just be the General and kick'em outta class every time they give u any trouble. Like, yunno, "set an example". Buuuuttt, then again, it could also backfire and they could get really pissed at you and grow some more attitude. So, use your "feeling" (i mean, every teacher (every GOOD teacher) has like this "sixth sense", i guess) to Figure out what's the best way to handle your class. It's going to be different every time. And every time you'll have to find a different approach. Hey, so much fun being a teacher. lol Good luck!
Jane	5/17/05 If he's good, be better.... if he's bad be worse... that should do.
Edna	6/5/05 Just behave like them.
Anonymous2	7/8/05 sometimes you just cannot do anything with them, in this case i just taught the rest of the class and generally the other students ignored the bad ones and didnt include them in any of the activities. this had a good effect on some of them as peer pressure is quite powerful. For some others i tried calling their parents but this doesnt always work as th students take it out on the whole group because they got a rollocking from mum and dad. For really bad students you can just exclude them from the classroom if all else fails. After all we're teachers and its not our job to control uncontrolable kids.

Figure 2.2 – Posts within the topic 'bad students'

Drawing on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL - in our analysis we first tackle the textual dimension aiming at depicting the

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[8] Teachers' names were substituted in order to protect their privacy

degree of dynamism of teachers and students as represented in the posts.

We focus on transitivity and on the ideational metafunction to tap into participants' roles according to the cline of dynamism (Hasan, 1985/1989). Next, based on Giddens' Structuration Theory, we concentrate on the social dimension in terms of role prescriptions, social practices and social structures (Giddens, 1984; Meurer, 2004, 2006).

3. Agency and the dynamic cline

The lexico-grammatical choices in a text reflect the writer's preferences and how he/she perceives the world, or in SFL terms, the ideational metafunction, which realizes the Field. The Field in the text 'bad students' is a discussion among EFL teachers in an online forum, about how to deal with adolescent students who misbehave during classes.

The writer's choices are also determined by the channel used for interaction, what SFL denominates Mode, realized by the textual metafunction, which in our text is hybrid since it is written and produced to be read silently, but presents typical features of spoken language, such as "i mean…", "Like, yunno".

Finally, the selection a writer makes is influenced by the relationship among the interactants, that is, Tenor, realized by the interpersonal metafunction. This relationship is established by EFL teachers from different backgrounds, who apparently share equal power as they ask for and give advice as well as share experiences in a cooperative exchange of posts on the specific topic 'bad students'.

Having briefly described the register variables which constitute the context of situation, this paper will hereafter focus on the ideational metafunction, which, as afore stated, represents how the world is perceived. The ideational metafunction is subdivided in experiential and logical meanings, the first being related to how experience is construed in discourse, and the latter to how ideas are connected in the flux of a text.

In this paper, we are concerned with the experiential dimension, that is, how teachers' discourse construes experience, more specifically, how teachers and students are depicted in the selected data. For this purpose, we analyze how the transitivity system is instantiated in these posts[9]. We focus on the processes which involve students and teachers

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[9] We assume reader's previous knowledge on the concepts of SFL.

as participants,[10] such as in "in this case i just taught the rest of the class ".

The first counting of the overall number of clauses in the selected posts revealed the occurrence of forty-one ranking clauses and four embedded ones, resulting in forty-five processes. Since the *topic* reports happenings taking place during classes, it is not surprising to encounter a majority of material processes (see Figure 3.1), which are the ones construing doings and happenings (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004).
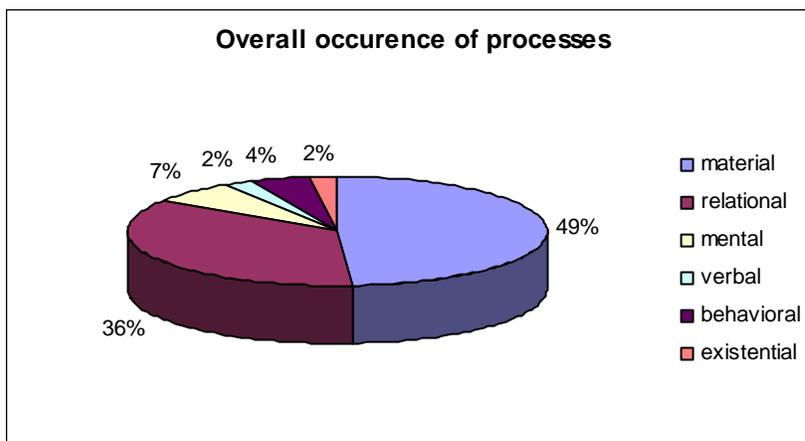
Figure 3.1 – Distribution of processes types in the corpus

Out of the forty-five processes encoded in the teachers' posts, only thirty-six contained teachers and/or students as participants. These were the ones explored in this paper. As shown in Figure 3.2, the occurrence of teachers as Actors surpasses that of students more than four times; however, the mere superiority of teachers' participation as Actor is not enough to determine their agency over students.
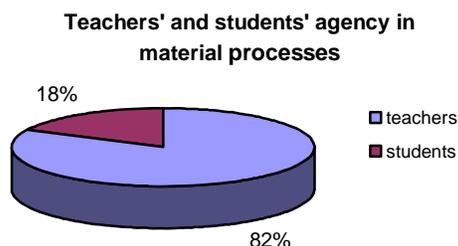
Figure 3.2 – Incidence of teachers and students as Actors

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[10]Although circumstances play an important role in the investigation of the experiential metafunction, they are not taken into consideration in the present analysis.

In order to obtain a more accurate interpretation of agency issues inscribed in the teachers' discourse in the forum, it is necessary to deepen the investigation of the functions performed by teachers and students as participants in a clause by considering other transitivity functions in the same clause (Hasan, 1985/1989). Thus we analyze other roles played by teachers and students following the *cline of dynamism* (Hasan, op.cit; Thompson, forthcoming), which categorizes these roles according to how dynamic they are in the text.

Through the cline of dynamism it is possible to verify which participants act over others and which ones are merely influenced or even dominated by this action, consequently helping to clarify power relations inherent in the discourse we are analyzing. Moreover, the analysis of participants' roles in a clause can reveal ideological investments, even when opaque, inherent in discourse of any kind (Fairclough, 1992).

In the analysis of the cline of dynamism, the distinction between the agent (as the most dynamic) and the object of the action (the most passive) is not restricted to Actor and Goal in Material Processes, as shown in Thompson's[11] (forthcoming) proposed adaptation of Hasan's (1985/1989) original (Figure 3.3).

Role
Assigner/Initiator
Actor (+Goal)
Actor (-Goal or +Scope)
Phenomenon (Subject)
Behaver
Sayer
Senser
Token
Carrier
Beneficiary
Phenomenon (Complement)
Scope
Goal
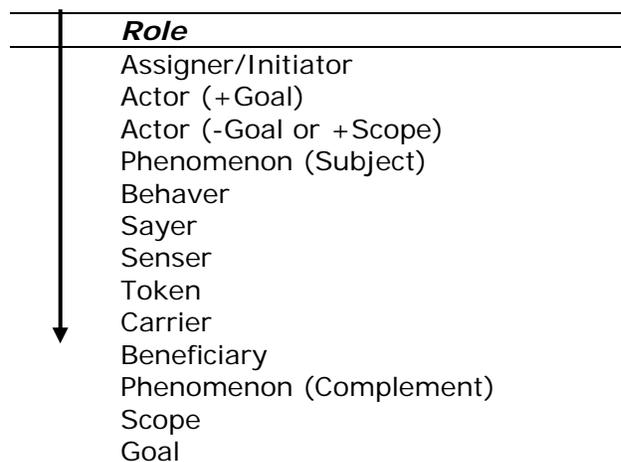
Figure 3.3 – Cline of Dynamism (Thompson, forthcoming, adapted from Hasan 1985/1989)

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[11] Geoff Thompson, professor at Liverpool University, England, develops research through the use of corpora to establish transitivity patterns, and the cline of dynamism he proposes is based on the study of a variety of texts.

Although teachers and students are not depicted as Assigners/Initiators[12], they play the role of Actor in the majority of the processes in which they participate (eighteen).

The analysis also showed that there is no coexisting occurrence of teachers and students as Actors, nor as any other role a participant may impersonate – which means that there is mutual exclusion on the part of teachers and students. This absence of joint roles by teachers and students suggests a corresponding absence of responsibility sharing in decision making inside the classroom.

The difference established between an Actor in a clause where there is a Goal and one in a goalless clause is significant. This is so because the Actor in the former is highly dynamic, since it affects an entity through either a transformative or creative process (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004); whereas an Actor in a clause without a Goal, or with a Scope is considered less dynamic because there is no entity affected by the process (see Figures 3.4 and 3.5).

Although a Scope is considered a participant, it is a complement which works as an extension of an intransitive verb realizing a material process (Halliday and Matthiessen, op.cit); therefore, it is not subjected to creation or transformation, as in clause 14 (Figure 3.5), where *some more attitude* is merely extending the meaning of the process.

cl. 38

For really bad students	**you**	can just exclude[13]	**them**	from the classroom
Circumstance of cause: behalf	**Actor**	Pr: material	**Goal**	Circumstance: location place

Figure 3.4 – Actor in a Process+Goal clause

cl. 14

and	**[ø]**	grow	**some more attitude**
	Actor	Pr: material	**Scope**

Figure 3.5 – Actors in a goalless process

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[12] The Assigner/Initiator is the most dynamic role in the sense that it is the one who causes other participants, such as Actors, Sayers, Sensers, Carrier and Tokens to be involved in processes, while the Goal stands for the most passive since it undergoes the effects of actions.

[13] Although exclude is typically a relational process, in this context it is related to the physical action of expelling students from class as in *kick them outta class.*

Besides distinguishing between Actors in a clause where there is a Goal and the ones in goalless clauses, it is vital for the establishment of the degree of dynamism to investigate the nature of this Goal. Teachers' acting on human Goals, the students, confers them a higher degree of dynamism than their acting on inanimate Goals (Hasan, 1985/1989). Acting on human Goals reinforces the inequality in power relations between teacher and students by portraying teachers as the ones in control.

Moreover, when students' action is considered inappropriate, teachers react in response. In the example in Figure 3.6 teachers represent themselves as exerting a transformative action (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004) on students by changing their position from being attendants to being expelled from class, which is more dynamic than if they threw a book away, for instance.

cl. 2

[ø]	Kick	**their freaking buttocks!**
Actor	Pr: material	**Goal**

cl. 10

[ø]	kick'	**em**	outta class	
Actor	Pr: material	**Goal**	Circumstance of location: spatial	

cl. 38

For really bad students	**you**	can just exclude	**them**	from the classroom
Circumstance of cause: behalf	**Actor**	Pr: material	**Goal**	Circumstance: location place

Figure 3.6 – Teachers' action on students

To the present moment, we have concentrated on extreme points at the cline, Actor and Goal; however, the intermediate roles do play a significant function regarding agency. The graphics in Figure 3.7 show all the roles played by teachers and students in the clauses in which they participate.
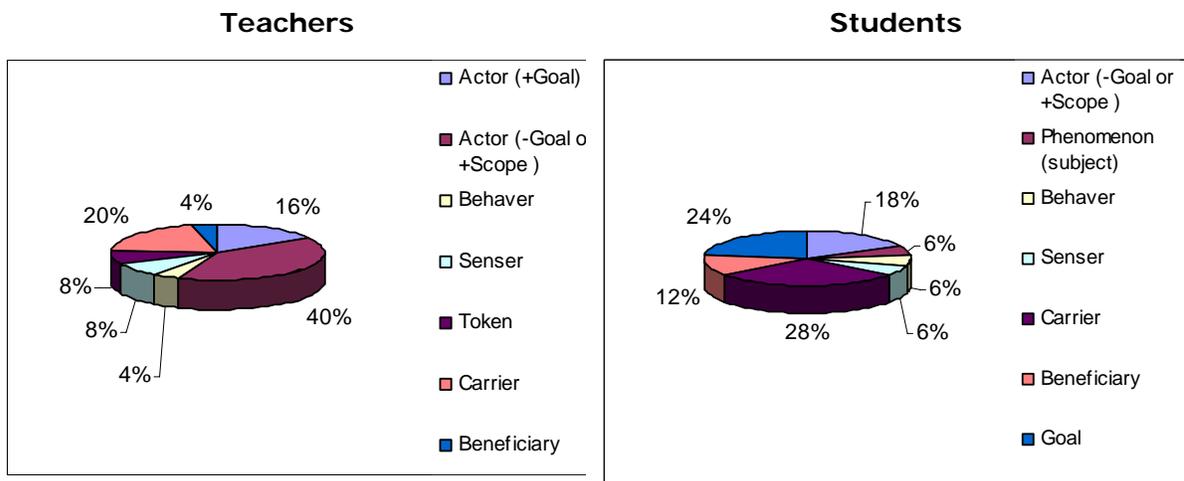
Teachers   **Students**

Figure 3.7 – Roles performed by teachers and students

According to Thompson (forthcoming), despite the validity of the cline shown in Figure 3.3, the placing of some roles in that cline may originate incertitude. To ameliorate this situation, he proposes, based on corpora analysis, the delimitation of six areas, with numerical values, grouping roles which apparently share a similar degree of dynamism. Figure 3.8 shows the cline with numerical representation of the roles from the least to the most dynamic.

-2	-1	0	1	2	3
Goal	Beneficiary Phenomenon (Complement) Scope	Token Carrier	Actor (-Goal or +Scope) Phenomenon (Subjetc) Behaver Sayer Senser	Actor (+Goal)	Assigner/ Initiator

Figure 3.8 – Dynamic values attributed to participants

We use Thompson's model to calculate the degree of dynamism of teachers and students as participants in the processes we are analyzing. The results obtained by multiplying the number of occurrences of each role participants play by the value given to this role (Figure 3.8) corroborate the conclusions drawn in this section, namely, that teachers are depicted as more dynamic than students. These scores offer a more visible picture of agency (Figure 3.9) ascribed to teachers and students in the posts.

	weight	**Students**		**Teachers**	
		no.	*score*	**no.**	*score*
Actor (+Goal)	*+2*			4	*+8*
Actor (-Goal or +Scope)	*+1*	3	*+3*	10	*+10*
Phenomenon (subject)	*+1*	1	*+1*		
Behaver	*+1*	1	*+1*	1	*+1*
Senser	*+1*	1	*+1*	2	*+2*
Token	*0*			2	*0*
Carrier	*0*	5	*0*	5	*0*
Beneficiary	*-1*	2	*-2*	1	*-1*
Goal	*-2*	4	*-8*		
Total			*-4*		*+20*

Figure 3.9 – Numerical representation of teachers' and students' dynamism

So far teachers' acting on students (Figure 3.10) has been detected through the transitivity exploration of the textual dimension. In the next section we discuss the social context in which the text analyzed is produced and reproduced.
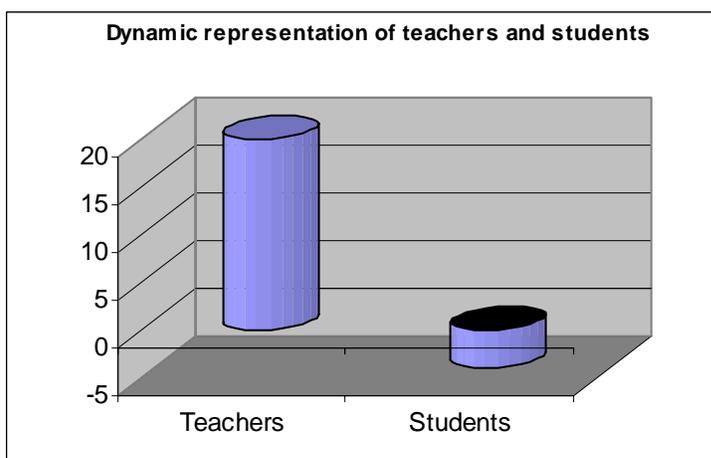
Figure 3.10 – Visual representation of teachers' and students' degree of dynamism

4. The social dimension – the concept of Agency

Aiming at clarifying issues related to the social context, we draw on Giddens' Structuration Theory as an "attempt to capture social life as dynamically organized in a flux of interconnected practices" (Meurer, 2004: 87).

Structuration theory sees the flux of social life as being enacted in three major dimensions: social practices, rules/resources and role

prescriptions. Figure 4.1 illustrates the dynamic relationship among these dimensions and how they are related to texts.
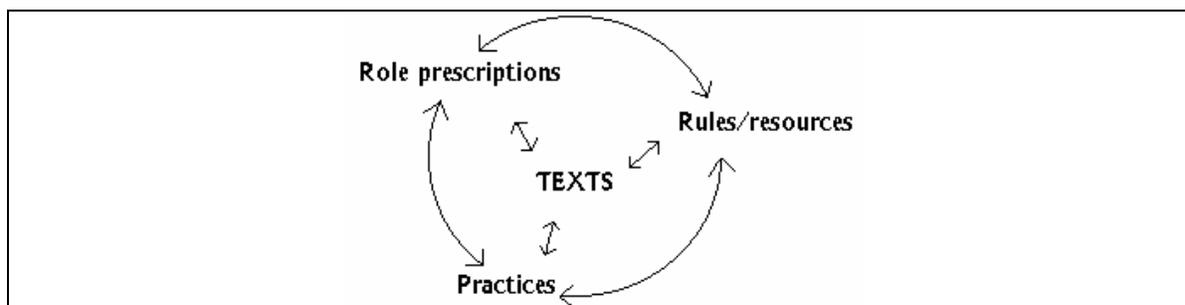

Figure 4.1-Map of the interplay among role prescriptions, rules/resources and social practices, and the dialectic relationship between texts and these social dimensions (Meurer, 2004, based on Giddens 1979/1994: 117).

The investigation of agency as construed in the teachers' posts in the forum should consider teachers' and students' acts within the complex notion of *duality of structure,* because, at the same time that the interplay of the three social dimensions enables these acts, these dimensions are recreated, reinforced (or possibly challenged) by them.

This concept is explained by Meurer (2004: 90): "as individuals act in the world through texts or otherwise, they make use of and, at the same time, recreate specific social structures". The properties which constitute these social structures are rules and resources (explained below), which influence and are influenced by social practices.

Social practices are the activities, the actions people engage in as they conduct their daily lives (Fairclough, 2003; Meurer, op.cit). Giddens employs the terms *agency* and *action* interchangeably to convey the meaning of "*the stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world*" (1984: 81: author's emphasis).

It should be emphasized that agency or action cannot be considered a mere set of acts, which we relate, in this paper, to the processes performed by teachers and students in the forum. Rather, they should be seen as acts that are regulated by and at the same time regulate social structures and social practices *in a continuous flow of conduct* (Giddens, 1979).

Both teachers' and students' actions tend to be delimited by the social identities they hold, and, consequently, will be determined by the prerogatives and obligations they believe are related to this position, in

other words, the *role prescriptions* (Giddens, op.cit, Meurer op.cit; 2006).

In the text analyzed, there are two distinct social identities presented: *teachers* and *badly behaved students*, positioned by the teachers who discuss in the forum as opposite sides in the social practice of teaching and learning EFL, teachers being the ones trying to do their jobs, while *certain* students, the badly behaved ones, disrupt the class. While the teachers are agents in the sense that they post messages in the forum, and thus discursively construct themselves and the badly behaved students, the students are agents only in the sense that they are discursively construed in the teachers' texts.

The identities construed in teachers' discourse are permeated with ideological representations – i.e., the textualization of prototypical features established by common sense – of what teachers are supposed to do and what badly behaved students are considered to be and how they are supposed to behave.

These representations can be analyzed in terms of the duties and prerogatives established by the role prescriptions associated with the established identities of teachers and of students, in specific social practices of teaching and learning, i.e., classrooms.

On the one hand, according to the text, it is the teachers' duty to *deal with badly behaved students*, not only by being *friendly* in some situations and showing authority and control in others, but also by being *versatile* in terms of knowing when/how to act in these different manners; on the other hand, it is the teachers' prerogative the right to refuse to deal with *badly behaved students* and to act as students do:

> "I mean… you could try and be friends with'em, […]"
> "Then again, you can just be the General and kick'em outta class every time they give u any trouble."
>
> "So, use your "feeling" (i mean, every teacher (every GOOD teacher) has like this "sixth sense", i guess) to Figure out what's the best way to handle your class." (Anonymous)
>
> "After all we're teachers and its not our job to control uncontrolable kids." (Anonymous 2)
>
> "Just behave like them." (Edna)

The representation of students' identity as *badly behaved ones* implicates roles and acts related to situations such as *give trouble, lose respect, get pissed at the teacher*; conversely, the supposed identity of

the *good* ones implies cooperating with the teachers by exercising peer pressure on badly behaved colleagues.

Role prescriptions as instantiated in specific social practices can only be looked at as they intermesh with social structure, which in Structuration Theory is constituted of rules and resources. These three broad dimensions of social life – role prescriptions, social practices and social structures – are simultaneously instantiated in the duality of structure, each dimension determining the other ones as means and result of action.

As Giddens states, "rules and resources are drawn upon by actors in the production of interaction, but are thereby also reconstituted through such interaction" (1979: 71).

Teachers' and students' actions (always part of a social practice) are regulated by rules characterized both as codes of signification, i.e., meanings, and normative elements, i.e., sanctioning (specified in Giddens, 1979, 1984)[14]. There are elements of Orkut which function as rules and, therefore in a certain manner, sanction members' behavior.

These sanctions are related to the publishing of material which is considered illegal or offensive, to the creation of fake profiles, and to *phishing* or account hijacking.

The sanctions for such behavior are established according to the level of the offense, going from temporary jail, when the offender "may not post or send messages on Orkut, but can view and read content" (Hempell, 2004), to the removal of content or profiles as well as the extinction of the community (Orkut.com).

The rules materialized in teachers' discourse sanction students' and teachers' own behaviour, implying that *students should behave well*, i.e., not disturb the class or disrespect the teacher, who, on the other hand, *should know how to handle the class*. These sanctions are closely related to meanings connected to the social practice of teaching and to the roles ascribed to teachers and students.

Structure, though, is not only constraining but also enabling, and thus individuals can exercise power according to the resources they possess (Giddens, op.cit; Meurer, 2004, 2006).

These resources are subdivided in two types: authoritative resources, i.e., resources that generate power over people, which can lead to sanctions through coercion, and allocative resources, i.e., resources that generate power over material things, which can be more

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[14] According to Giddens (op.cit) it is the recursivity of social practices which originate rules and ascribe meaning to them.

subtle in the forms of domination by the use of inducement (Giddens, op.cit).

It is not surprising that the text depicts only authoritative resources, since it concentrates on behavior[15]. A comparison of the resources teacher and students are supposed to possess is drawn on table 4.1 below:

Teachers	Students
✓ Respect due to their position ✓ Feeling/ sixth sense (know how) ✓ Experience ✓ Power to include/exclude students from the class/activities ✓ Parents' help	✓ Behavior (they can facilitate or make it difficult for teachers) ✓ Exclude /ignore classmates
Table 4.1- Authoritative resources ascribed to teachers and students	

Teachers are depicted as the ones who have more resources and hold the power, corroborating the results obtained from the analysis of the textual dimension in relation to agency and power. Such power can be used to perpetuate practices or to innovate and try new possibilities.

Although the posts reveal a tendency to perpetuate social practices where the teacher holds the power and the student has a peripheral role in the classroom, the social practice of exchanging posts on the net in which teachers reflect on their practice may offer possibilities for changes.

Nevertheless, not all the teachers who engage in the discussions present evidence of deeper pondering on their practices, and some teachers use this online resource to be humorous or facetious and sarcastic, giving vent to frustrations related to classroom interaction.[16]

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[15] We are aware, however, that there are situations where allocative resources play an important role inside the classroom, for example, in private schools, where students (or their parents) "pay" teachers' salary and thus may feel entitled to use it as a manner of coercion.

[16] Further research, as suggested by an anonymous reviewer (who we would like to thank), might be carried out regarding teachers' reflections on their practices and possibilities for change. One might ask, for instance: do the teachers who respond to call to discuss a given topic consider Orkut a place for simply giving vent to their feelings, and when they align themselves with a given problem do they mainly intend to show solidarity to colleagues? Do they know about and are willing to consider existing literature on the topic discussed? Do they believe – as expressed in their

It is also relevant to notice that different contexts overlap in the posts. On the one hand, there is the social practice of exchanging posts on the net, in which teachers reflect on classroom practices, using resources and complying with certain rules (community standards), at the same time that they play specific roles (looking for advice, offering advice, mediating the discussion).

On the other hand, classroom encounters constitute another social practice, also characterized by its own structure (rules/resources) and role prescriptions. This overlapping of different contexts is coined by Meurer (2004) as *intercontextuality,* which should also be taken into consideration in discourse analysis.

Final Remarks

We have used an approach encompassing the fields of linguistics and sociology, drawing, more specifically, on SFL and Structuration Theory as an apparatus to investigate agency as construed in discourse. We looked at roles played by teachers and students as instantiated in a discussion forum of the Orkut community – *English Language Teachers*. We suggest that the joint application of the two theories may offer a relevant portrait of discourse as a reflection of the social practices where it is inserted.

We are aware that the results obtained are restricted to a specific topic in the forum and to a limited context. Nevertheless, these results are relevant because they unveil rules in the form of values/significations and resources in the form of authority ascribed to teachers, both materialized in a widely accessed type of online media. Thus, although there is no basis for generalizations, our analysis revealed how social practices, identities and ideology can be perpetuated in an everyday text.

Our analysis also suggests that it is necessary to deconstruct texts in order to unveil values and power relations which may not be detected in a non-critical reading. A superficial reading of the text analyzed might suggest, for instance, that students' behavior determines teachers' actions, portraying students as agents who cause reactions.

However, what the analysis reveals – regarding both the textual dimension, not only due to teachers' highly dynamic participation in relation to students', but also to the lack of co-participation in the

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representations – that teaching is a matter of "feeling" and may dispense with theoretically based reflections?

processes analyzed, and the social dimension, mainly because of the higher plethora of resources ascribed to teachers – is the perpetuation of the view that the power of decision on what direction to take remains the sole responsibility of teachers.

Acknowledgements

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