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## Journalistic Narrative: a Story of Real Life

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### Abstract

The urban centers are home to humble human beings, who circulate in the social periphery and remain nearly invisible to most of population. Many modern journalistic narratives have sought to redeem these kinds of people of anonymity in reports that escape the impact model for information only. It's called literary journalism that presents the fact by using literature expressive resources to present real-life characters. So this communication aims to present a reading from the perspective of dialogical language of the report "Signal closed to Camila" and its illustration from Eliane Brum's book *A vida que ninguém vê* (2006) in order to demonstrate how to configure this real-life character, which circulates in a large urban center, living on the margins of society, whose identity is ignored by the population. The aim therefore is to discuss this narrative format that expects to awaken the reader to the reality around him/her through stories which excel at dramatic tone and tension that surrounds the characters represented therein. This kind of narrative substitutes the literary function of stories, whose current contemporary purpose is to discuss the narrator's own development process, as illustrated by the metalinguistic narratives from Nuno Ramos (2008), André Queiroz (2004), among others. To fulfill this proposal, the theoretical reference is the theory / analysis of the language from the perspective of Bakhtin's Circle, considering the dialogic relationships between image / text / context, and the compositional form, style and tone that make up the narrative evaluative reported. So it aims to demonstrate how the report configure the character's identity by giving her visibility, promoting the reader's active memory and configuring an identity profile of urban living on the urban periphery.

### Keywords

real-life narratives; genres; dialogical analysis of language

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## INTRODUCTION

In our modern world, the means of communication are responsible for articulating an evaluation of facts and public figures according to their own interests and ideologies. More often than not, readers take in the facts as presented without any critical approach. Therefore, it is important for any linguistic study to point out the relationships between the verbal and visual messages that impregnate the media statements, the facts, and their social context. As important as the written text in the making of those statements, the images that usually accompany the verbal text also convey implicit meanings, which are perceived even before the actual reading of its written counterpart. Thus, the photograph plays a significant role in the opinion formation of their readers. According to Benetti (2007), the pact between the "authorized" journalist and the "capacitated" reader to understand his/her

message has been built over the years based on ideological foundations. Consequently – as every ideology is “simplifying and schematic” –, it creates “the false appearance of something natural and evident” (Benetti, 2007, p.39). Facts as presented are not challenged by the reader because they come dressed with that aura of veracity. From that point of view, the images printed on the press reports are powerful because they are taken as representative of the truth. Besides, in the process of writing, journalists have in mind a kind of reader that is prominently visual, so they build their articles based on the recipient’s wishes and desires.

It is fundamental to understand that they are “positioning” movements, for that is how the links between a journalist and a reader, a reader and a magazine, or a group of readers and a magazine are formed. It is how what we call a discursive community is forged – a group for which the rules make sense and in which their members acknowledge one another as equals once they share the same sensations, wishes, thoughts, and values (Benetti, 2007, p. 39-40).

In order to discuss such question, Bakhtin’s dialogic theory of language is fundamental to comprehend how the relationships among the enunciator, the reader, and the social context are connected.

### **DIALOGIC THEORY OF LANGUAGE**

Bakhtin’s dialogical theory states that language has a dual constitution based on the dialogue between the self and the internalized other. That fundamental principle thinks language as a something doubly oriented, thus freeing it from the more mechanical processes of interpretation. The development of such theoretical approach brings significant implications on the common conceptualizations of discourse as well as on the language manifestations themselves.

One of its basic concepts is that the enunciation is an event on the discursive chain which is in its turn linked to the other’s discourse in a dialogical way and which is also projected into the future as it awaits for the responsive attitudes of its possible readers. Thus, it is part of a discursive continuum, keeping dialogical relations with the presumed reader and the socio-historical moment, waiting for the answers of its immediate addressees and the future ones (superaddressees), as in Bakhtin (2003, p. 302):

When speaking, I always take into consideration the non perceptible background of my discourse’s perception by the addressee: to what extent he/she is aware of the situation, if he/she has any special knowledge about a given cultural field of communication; I take into account his/her conceptions and convictions, prejudices (from my point of view), sympathies and antipathies – all that will determine the active understanding of my enunciation by him/her.

The concepts of concrete enunciation and of dialogical relations are closely linked to discursive genres. As conceptualized by Bakhtin and his Circle, genres are more or less stable forms that guide human communication in its discursive practice.

Hence, in every human activity within the areas of production and circulation, discursive genres are the more or less stable models of communication, which are composed in terms of theme, compositional form and style. The comprehension of those models is

intuitive and, according to Bakhtin (2003, p. 283), learning to express oneself is above all learning the typical forms of those generic enunciations, which are found in the most diverse circles of human activity. Besides, they also express a way of seeing the world. Consequently, they are charged with an assessing tone of ideological nature.

Seeing communication as an enunciation which is embedded in the social context is what makes Bakhtin's theory unique, because there is a constant, and tense, dialogue between speaker and listener – or enunciator and addressee –, depending on the context and on the individual values of the participants in the process. As this philosopher of language says:

The enunciation is full of dialogical tones, and without taking them into consideration it is impossible to understand the enunciation's style to the fullest. Because our ideal – be it philosophical, scientific, artistic – is born and formed in the interactive process and the struggle of our thoughts and the others', and that cannot be devoid of reflexes in the verbalized forms of expression of our thoughts (Bakhtin, 2003, p. 298).

The ideological and assessing character of the enunciation's theme is not reducible to meaning. It is so because the meaning of a word within the system of a language is indefinitely repeated, whereas the theme is mobilized in the enunciation and, therefore, it is unique and unrepeatable. Such question, as discussed by Bakhtin/Voloshinov ([1929] 2006) a distinction is made between meaning and theme in a very productive way for the study of the written text, for the words taken from the system of language – itself of a stable and repeatable nature – take on new meanings in each moment of their repetition, depending on the socio-historical context, by carrying the assessing tone of the enunciator and, consequently, featuring an ideological aspect.

Thus, each utterance is *individual* and *unrepeatable*, and essentially related to its context, therefore under variations throughout time, according to Bakhtin (2006, p. 44): "Each epoch and social group has their own repertoire of forms of discourse within the socio-ideological communication. To each group of forms belonging to the same genre, that is, to each form of social discourse, there is a corresponding group of themes."

Machado (2007, p.211) explains the discursive genre concept, including its chronological evolution as an important theme of dialogical language theory: 'To Bakhtin's theory, the genre lives in the present but remembers its past, its beginning [...] the discursive genres create chains that, because they are reliable to the great time, they accompany the variability of language uses along the time.'

So the concept of discursive genre is important to understand the new forms of reported enunciation that take place in every social moment, considering the author's purpose, the reader and the social context. The new journalistic narrative is a good example of the genre evolution related to literature language and style. The report wants to break the standard vision that prevents reader from seeing human beings who circulate in large urban centers. So the context acts on the enunciation as the same way that the new reader wants or expects another kind of information. This form of interference throughout time and space was named by Bakhtin chronotope, which is explained in his book about literature and aesthetic (Bakhtin, 1990). At this point of view the new journalism tries to approach the reader to the human

nature of facts instead of relating it impartially. So that is the way Eliane Brum's reports configure.

### **NARRATIVE REPORT**

The new journalism introduces the real facts of life in a different way, using the expressive language to touch the reader and makes him/her to view things in another way he/she couldn't perceive. The new journalism seeks to show the facts that are not normally aired in the press committed to objectivity.

This type of text was introduced by reporters like Capote and Gay Talese. The same occurs in Brazilian journalism, after Joel Silveira and some others. Eliane Brum turned short reports in literary pieces like a chronic. In the collection *The life that nobody sees* (2006), the journalist presents to the reader narratives about people that have no importance to the daily press. They live outside, at the environment of the great urban centers, and they are almost invisible to the public reader of daily press. "Signal closed to Camila" is an example of this kind of narrative that tells us a story of a poor little girl that lives on the street asking for money to survive. The chorus she used is the introduction of her story: "Beautiful uncle, beautiful aunt of my heart. I ask if you don't have a buck or something like for this poor little girl" (p.126).

The report tells us her story: she was a ten-year-old little girl who, like many others girls and boys, was living in a quarter far from downtown of Porto Alegre (Brazil), named Bom Jesus. Her parents were unemployed and the girl since she was six years old stays on the street near the traffic lights begging for money. She was captured by the city police and was taken to a children reformatory from where she escaped many times. The last time she escaped with five girls, and they walked aimlessly through the city. As it was very hot that Sunday, Camila and two other girls decided to take a bath in Guaíba river, near the park of Brasil Marine, but Camila did not know how to swim and sank into the river. On Monday the family took notice about the girl's death, but The Legal Medical Department did not care to give information to the family, that had to wait till Tuesday to bury the corpse. As the family was very poor and the social institution that takes care of underage people has neglected the care of the girls and took no action on the trail of the girls, the department decided to pay the funeral, that was verging on the ostentatious: "Paid also to a funeral chapel with conditioning air" (p.128). The funeral conditions contrast with the poverty of the family, that was miserable. So the relatives was delighted with it: "What a beautiful place, the family repeats amazed at the space so big and green ,accompanied by an entourage of relatives' defeated faces"(p.128).

As the speaker wants to demonstrate the contrast between the living conditions of those family members, including Camila, with the refined funeral atmosphere; the narrator relies on the intelligence of the reader to realize the contradiction.

Thus, Brum qualifies the reader as an interpreter of conflicting voices expressed in the statement, the narrator's reporting and describing the original environment of Camila and their relatives, as opposed to the delighted expressions on the scene of death, as if the dead mattered little at that time.

It follows that the work with the language is not the only information, but it presents an evaluative intonation to touch the reader, causing so responsive attitudes, if not action, at least awareness and reflection. Besides the description of the environment, the family life of Camila, the reporter emphasized the traits of her father, in order to define the profile of human degradation. To accomplish his description Brum selects some physical aspects of the man at the moment of the burial: "In the procession, a single suit. Frayed and stained, worn by a man who opened the suffering in the face grooves. A man trying to grab the dignity which escaped as the waistband bigger than him" (p. 128).

The expressive features that mark the profile description present a dubious father of human degradation and lack of prospects. The noun phrase that opens the paragraph constituted by metonymy, devalues the subject as a function of the object, mainly by the characteristics attributed to the suit, "worn and stained", which are transferred to his user. The peculiarities of the suit are also those of who wears. However they are external characteristics that shape the man profile, as if he was the victim of his living conditions.

The slaughter and suffering that the "open furrows" seems to excuse his absence and his lack of responsibility with his daughter. It suggests that his life situation was greater than his ability to control, as expressed by the comparison between the test to recover his dignity associated with trying to keep his pants waist.

In this configuration, the evaluative tone of the speaker is marked by irony. The first presentation of the father as a man addicted to drink and violence make up a negative image. However, it seems to go beyond the personal context in which the head of the family cannot fulfill his role because he is also helpless in the social context: an unemployed person. Thus, the generic style of a more evaluative information that is outweighed by the individual style, letting the gaze of the speaker-subjective reporter.

The narrator characterizes the persons in an impressive way, they are being presented and the plot moves gradually to the climax, the wake of Camila, where social conflict is exposed in a dramatic and ironic tone.

Despite being a third-person narrative, as required by the informative genre, the tone adopted reveals the subjective and evaluative view of the reporter. The exemption required in dealing with the investigated object is abandoned due to the need to awaken the critical eye of the reader because these invisible beings are presented to him/her for the first time, as the title of the book suggests, they are human beings who nobody sees.

Camila is presented as a fragile girl, rejected by her parents, but with a touch of sensibility recognized by the chorus she used to sing in order to get some money to survive. This charmed song that opens the text is a kind of resource to involve the reader and to give him/her Camila's sensitive perception besides her miserable condition. The same artifice is employed in another way at the end of the report, when the narrator assumes Camila's voice and words in her discourse.

In the same way, the author abandons the objectivity, using literary resources as antithesis, metonymy, metaphor, rhythm and so on. The antithesis is powerful when the author emphasizes the contrast between the richness of the funeral and the miserable parents look as her father's coat, very big for his tale. The description of the scenery is also made in contrast with the beauty of nature environment and the sadness of death.

The rhythmic structure of the refrain that opens Camila's story is perceived in the compositional form by the use of a poetic tone. The title metaphor "Signal close to Camila" is the axial image.

So Brum leaves the compositional form of the journalist genre, using a subjective way to describe the people and their life. The report theme of relevant events chosen to circulate in sphere of daily press is also abandoned. In this way, the generic style is changed by the subjective reporter inflection. As Bakhtin's dialogic concept of language, the utterer has in mind the presumed reader at the moment he/she expresses an utterance (Bakhtin, 2003). According to it, Brum has in mind a reader that does not pay attention to little events because he/she is shelled by the bombastic press or by the important economical and political events, ignoring the surrounding reality. In the countercurrent of daily press, changing the journalistic pattern of discursive genre, Brum tries to move the reader showing another scene on that he/she does not pay attention.

#### *VISUAL LANGUAGE: PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE AND MEANING*

The photo that illustrates the news is very important to transmit implicit meaning to compound the utterance in its totality. So the visual images are very important to make sense possible. Brum's reports are illustrated by Paulo Franken a photographer that tries to grasp in an image Brum's evaluative tone. So all the illustrations are in black and white, composing dramatic figures according to the tragic lives profiled in the verbal report.

At the first page of the report, there is an image that is a kind of photography changed by the designer that anticipates the girl profile. The artistic picture captures the upper part of her body, visible against the glass of a car window. The image is blurred, we cannot see clearly her feature, only her eyes is clearly seen by a square delineated around it looking to an invisible driver. At the right side of her head it is the title: "Signal close to Camila". This metaphor is related to the visual figure expressed in the illustration by the window glass against what her face was wrinkled. This image is according to the first words reported, a song that is Camila's characterization voice, begging in the street. The unknown driver, that cannot be seen because he/she is out of sight, puts Camila in direct contact with the reader's eyes, as if she was trying to enter in the reader's world.

The eyes centralization turned to outside is very important to the photographic efficacy and to the feeling effects in the spectator. About it Foucault (1995) comments Velásquez's artistic work "Las meninas", Foucault (1995) declares that the frontal look, captured in a painting, falls in an empty space because the personage looks at nothing. However, the spectator at the moment he/she gasps this directed look feels as if this personage was looking to him.

Although Foucault is discussing painting art, the philosopher/linguistic statements are appropriated also to understand the photographic effects. Thus the way the face and the eyes were captured affects the spectator reception, as if it was a change between both the personage and the spectator.

So when the picture focuses Camila's eyes, watching at the reader, it incites a change of roles, as if the reader could take the girl's place. The mirror image instigates this kind of exchange, but there is a glass between them. The world of each other is not the same.

Besides, according to Freeman (2005, p. 27), the position of the frontal part of the head representation is fundamental in photograph, mainly if it was erected and looking ahead at the camera. This way to capture the image gives to the spectator a security and sincerity sensation, while an oblique position suggests a certain timidity. In this case, Camila's head is presented in an askew angle, expressing a humble position.



Figure 1. Photography by Paulo Franken (Agência RBS de Notícias), in "The Life that Nobody See", pp. 124-125

Camila's portrait that illustrates the beginning of the narrative is a metonymy of her poverty and the car window, that is an impediment to establish contact with an invisible driver. It indicates the wall that separates her life from the life of other people. It's a blurred image, we can not see her face as we can not see her as a person. She is like a shadow, without flesh and bone. Nothing is clearly delineated. Only after the reading of her story her voice sounds in a refrain, the same one that opens and finishes the text.

The image in black and white definition seems to register a world without perspective, without brightness. The image is blurry and opaque. Only her eyes seem to contrast, as if that square served as a frame, there was a gap for a contact with the reader. However, they are caught in a side view, biased, with a part still in the shade, which can be barely noticed. The illustration graphic project highlights what the text tries to reflect, this way the designer is connected with the report's author, turning image and text as a complete and concrete utterance, according to Bakhtin's theory (2003). This kind of relationship establishes an intense dialogue between the report and the designer that involves the reader.

The story told in third person does not affect the complete objectivity, as the narrator approaches the characters in such a way that she expresses with her own words the words and thoughts of these human beings using free indirect discourse. This kind of resource even confuses the reader about the authorship of certain expressions, which the narrator uses, merging the views between narrator and character. In opposition to the journalistic objectiveness the author assumes an identification, even if momentary, between the storyteller and the object of his investigation. Throughout the text, there are several moments of mixture of speeches, which indicate the author's empathy with the characters portrayed in the story, especially Camila. The text final words demonstrate the intersection of voices: "And now, beautiful uncle, beautiful aunt, what do we do?" (Brum, 2006, p.128) The narrator and the character sound in one voice.

The final section concludes that the report demonstrates the narrator's proposal to involve the reader with the drama of those ordinary people abandoned to their fate, whose responsibility, the bias of the narrator, is also the company that the reader and her own part: "You and I, too, are complicit in her death. We all murdered. The question is how many Camilas have to die before we lower the glass of our unconsciousness. Do you know? And now, beautiful uncle, beautiful aunt, what do we do?" (p.128)

The resumption of the first stage, expressing Camila's refrain begging in the street, in an interdiscursive way, is ironic in nature, as a ruse to provoke the reader. The fact told as a literary story has therefore proposed an individual style improving and changing the discursive genre. Brum's purpose is to awake the reader, to move him/her to social reality. So, her story as a concrete utterance does not end at the final dot, according to Bakhtin's dialogic theory (2003). The dot points out a temporary end, because the utterance awaits the responsive attitude of the readers, especially by the tone imposed by the inquisitive reporter. The question requires a reader's positioning: "Do you know? [...] What do we do?" The answer is suspended, and the reader is invited to answer the questions. So the reporter identified with the sufferance of humble people tries to move the indifferent reader to pay attention to this human being that is far from his/her world.

## **FINAL WORDS**

Bakhtin's reflections allow us to analyze the non-literary genres, expanding the language conception of utterance.

He presents the discursive genre theory, as a complex statement, accompanying the proposal of the speaker communication. Furthermore the utterance is conceived considering the presumed reader and his/her social horizon. So Bakhtin offers a field of study of the statements circulating in various spheres of human activity, escaping with fixed forms and reducing genres that are usually treated.

From this perspective, it is possible to observe the fluctuation and the crossing of genres, such as it occurs between the literary and journalistic spheres. In providing the generic style double orientation, in other words, establishing it as a generic standard and individual choice, the Russian linguist updates the treatment and the understanding of the genres that change depending on the socio-historical moment, as seen today.



In this way, Brum's report is an example of a new kind of discursive genre. As she uses a subjective perspective with an inflection value, not usual for the journalist language, she overpasses the generic model that circulates in journalistic sphere. She works on the language style of approaching the literary, creating a sort of impasse: journalistic report or chronic?

Above all, the answer to this question is in the background in this case. The most important is to note that the dialogue held between the reporter and the reader is productive, exposing a proposal that escapes the common reports. The intention to approach these human beings invisible to society to the reader reality becomes successful.

A report prepared in accordance with the standard of journalism would not have the impact necessary to instill the critical eye of the reader, mobilizing his conscience. This is Brum's device that justifies the dialogue between the literary and journalistic genres to tell the real stories of invisible and abandoned human beings who circulate in the streets.

Taking into consideration Bakhtin's chronotopy concept (1990), responsible for the genres transformation in light of new needs and new proposals of speakers, it is observed that this type of report answers to a new context. Considering Bakhtin's statement concept, the transformations occur in according to society progress, presuming an immediate reader and a third one:

Every utterance has always a recipient (of varied nature, different degrees of proximity, concreteness, comprehensibility, etc.) whose responsive understanding is anticipated and addressed by the author. He is the second (once again not in arithmetic order). However, beyond this recipient (second), the author of the statement suggests, more or less consciously, a higher top recipient (third), whose absolutely fair responsive understanding he presupposes, either in the metaphysical distance or in a distant historical time. (Bakhtin, 2003, p. 333)

By breaking the models of informative reports, Eliane assumes a reader that is unmoved by daily information. This is because such information lives the impasse of objectivity or sensationalism that has caused the reader's social inertia. Therefore, Brum's proposal, by using the expressiveness of literary language, abandoning the informative style, answers to need that literature does not focus on the individual and psychological problems naturally arisen from economic progress or mechanization of human actions. Furthermore, the influence of new media has led the authors to shorten and synthesized speech, expressing themselves in more synthetic stories. Such authors expose the anguish that the present moment causes in humans without ideals. Thus, the most recent literary genres, like the mini stories, question the process of writing and its function, rather than have a closer look at the next beings whose life is relegated to the abandonment.

Accordingly, Eliane Brum's reports seek to fulfill this literary space, composing stories that move between the two spheres of the human activity: the journalistic and literary, in order to mobilize the reader, to drag him to the peripheral world of which he seeks isolation. The car window is a metaphor which illustrates the conflict between these two urban areas: the periphery and the center of economy, poverty and progress. The picture changed artistically summarizes the report that the written text mentions. The irony that runs through the visual and verbal images echoes the dissonance between the real world and the desired world, prefigured by the reporter.

Brum's strategy is to provoke critical reflection, causing impact in the reader, placing him in his social reality. This way, the reporter role is fulfilled in an intense and provocative way though it runs opposite of the mainstream media. Thus she breaks the paradigm of objectivity and impartiality as the press pattern.

By publishing them in *Zero Hora*, widely circulated newspaper in a Brazilian capital, Porto Alegre city, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brum challenged the model, changed the style of their reports and risked being disqualified as a journalist. Many critics consider her reports as chronic instead of a journalist report. On the back cover of the book, such classification appears: "She is a reporter in search of events which are not popular and people who are not celebrities. She is a reporter in search of the extraordinary anonymous life. She is a writer who delves into the daily routine to prove that there are no ordinary lives."

However, the journalist role is determined by the investigation, the recovery of real people's life story and actual data resulting from research. This way it gets far from the chronicles. Journalists, like Ricardo Kotscho, attach Eliane to the role of a great reporter, following old concepts, when the reporters sought to enhance the human side of the facts reported. "By reading what Eliane writes today, no one can say that great reporters are no longer produced as before" (Kotscho, 2006, p.177).

As it can be seen, the generic model presents change from the past to the present and from the present to the past as Bakhtin says. The genres are adapted to the needs of the historical moment and to the speaker's communication proposal. Eliane Brum, against the current style of reporting, recovers patterns from the past and updates them in order to fulfill a role that is relegated to the background, to sensitize the reader's eyes to the reality that surrounds him. Just like any utterance, according to Bakhtin's concept, her stories await for the reader's answer.

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