The paratext within the didactic communication

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Résumé : Cet article tente une argumentation de fait que le paratexte dans le discours didactique représente un seuil mobile entre le professeur – énonciateur et l'élève – destinataire et la communication entre les deux actants actant de l'action didactique se réalise par des opérations sémiotiques telles que les actes de rhétorique, la proxémique, la gestualité, la mimique et la psychopédagogique. On met en évidence l'existence de deux types de manifestations dans le cadre de paratexte en appartenant au discours didactique : l'une sur le discours didactique oral (celui exprimé directement vers le professeur – énonciateur, ou celui sur le support audio ou vidéo) et l'autre liée au discours didactique écrit (celui appartenant au texte de manuel ou trouvé sur les planches, sur les petites morceaux de carton, ou sur tout autre support utilisé par le professeur comme matériel aidant dans la leçon).

Mots-clés : paratexte, didactique, idéologie émergente, contexte normatif, discours écrit et oral.

The enunciator-teacher – paratext relationship

Before starting the developing of this chapter we feel it necessary to mention that all along our approach we considered the enunciator-teacher having a double role; on the one hand he is a plurivalent instance: of control, enunciation and assessment of the teaching-learning process of the didactic discourse. On the other hand, depending on the recipient, he is the knowledge interpreter and rephraser. We highlight the importance of the existence of the didactic enunciator's intermittence, especially in the discourse of a foreign language learning, which determines the existence of an enunciation in which the enunciator comes again in the foreground of the didactic discourse, withdrawing afterward in its background, becoming a tacit mediator of the didactic events.

In the first instance, the visible one, the teacher, enunciator of the didactic discourse, is in charge with the establishing of the building axes of the didactic discourse, with the establishing of the objectives aiming at the achievement of the teaching-learning process, with the explanation, illustration, argumentation, translation and rephrasing, with the making and remaking of the meaning of the knowledge tools. In the second instance, the implicit one, the teacher becomes director, psychologist, coordinator, actor, mediator, and producer of social and psychological signs and moreover of signs leading to semiotics.

The relationship between the didactic enunciator and the paratext lies on the establishing of an intervention system of the enunciator aiming at the activation of the paratextual construct. The system is made of semiotic operations such as: rhetorical, proximal, gesture, mimic and psycho pedagogical acts (the pronunciation of the words in such a way as to draw the recipient's attention, the use of a tonality that could seduce the recipient, the use of the semiotic silence whose aim is to produce suspense moments, waiting for what is to come, the use of some impact phrases that could raise the recipient's interest, such as: “Let’s see who can use the presented model in the next exercise.” Last but not least, there is also the large generous gesture of the arms, showing altruism, kindness, communication that are meant to draw the didactic recipient’s attention upon an object to be analyzed, combined with an open, positive, affective mimic.

All these semiotic manifestations are nothing but types of paratexts of the oral didactic discourse that regulates the functioning of the didactic communicative gearing (structures of presentation, organization, exemplification, etc.)

2 Ibidem.
The enunciator can’t have a direct contact with the paratext unless under a guiding, taking the form of the presentation of a central subject, of a basic theme which is part of the teaching process to make the recipient feel at ease with the taught subject.

The didactic enunciator needs to be coherent and rational all along the didactic process in order to help the didactic recipient build his own itinerary and his own approach. Take for instance the case of foreign language learning: the student establishes some lexical and grammatical guide marks that he uses to access the information quickly. The learning of an English tense (Present Tense Continuous) is possible through the imitation of some examples offered by the didactic enunciator and the practice of these patterns until they are learnt.

The teacher offers the student the means through which the latter builds a coherent background that offers him facilitating reference points (Berthoud, Démazière, 1998;9)3, such as indirect explanations; knowing that the expression to be on the wrong side of the blanket has a negative meaning and the object referred to is a household item, intimate, what is the first thing that crosses your mind, taking into account the literary context you come across the expression? The enunciator oscillates between the choix linguistique and choix pedagogique4, which, in fact corresponds to the situations of the use of language and the use of communication. The didactic enunciator is often in the situation of using the innovation to achieve his didactic goals. Due to its semiotic nature (of multilateral interpretation of the linguistic signs) the paratext belongs to the innovative manifestation of the discourse. Its flexible programming provides it with different forms of manifestation: pedagogical (means of achieving the established aims suggested by the enunciator-teacher in the teaching-learning process: role games, pantomime), psychological (situations of practicing the taught knowledge that could engage spontaneous reactions: laughter, indignation) social (the re-creation of the knowledge gained outside the didactic space, in a public space such as a theatre or opera).

All these tools conceived by the teacher and meant to help the didactic receiver are accomplished by inter-textual means, used as normative context, having the attributions of organizing the pedagogical actions performed by the didactic enunciator. Further on these attributions become operational learning tools. (depending on the degree of difficulty, the exercises in the textbook could be a well-organized paratext and it can make reference to the situations in which we use the knowledge objects meant for learning: rephrase the text below using the tag-questions patterns).

The paratext appears both in the oral discourse (the teacher’s, direct, or on an audio-visual support) and in the written discourse (handouts, panels). The corroboration of the two textual hypostases determines the evolution of the didactic discourse in general and its concentration on interpretative axes: intellectual, affective, moral and pedagogical. The intellectual interpretation within the paratext is represented by the way in which the paratextual items are used (exercises, quotes, notes) by the didactic enunciator (e.g. the formulation of a task emphasizing some words or filling in the gaps: Fill in the gaps with the correct tenses; read the sentences carefully paying attention to the adverbs).

The moral interpretation of the didactic paratext manifests like some units of truth and value that deal with the respecting of the scientific strictness that should accomplish the practical apparatus of the lesson and send some valorising messages in the social context (e.g. the correctness of the tasks and the positive messages in the exercises aiming at using some ideas from the text in the communicative context: e.g. think of as many uses as possible of the word altruism in the European Union political context).

The affective interpretation resorts to the choosing of some subjects that could sensitive the personality of the didactic enunciator and their exploitation within the practical context of the exercises, e.g. Write an essay the Romeo and Juliet theme. The pedagogical interpretation outlines around the making of the exercises whose target is to reinforce the acquired knowledge and its cognitive trajectory (e.g. rearrange logically the paragraphs in the text below).

The interpretative types in the paratext are symmetrical to the attributions of the enunciator-teacher who participates intellectually (through the cognitive pre-constructs that he builds with the purpose of the efficient exploitation of the information and its optimal transmission to the receiver.) Lead-in approaches: “Does anybody know about anything about this subject?” or

"debate on this idea starting from this point of view". Another attribution of the enunciator-teacher refers to affectivity, whose role is to humanize the didactic discourse, trying to bring near the enunciator and the receiver, by creating a passion climate, accomplished with a didactic aim. Take for instance the use of a warm vocal tonality that could express inner warmth, trust and communicative availability and may affect the didactic distance of the lesson in a favourable way or the use of such expressions as: “My dears”, or words like “together” and the use of the generic plural that implies both the existence of the student and of the teacher in the same human unity (“now we know what the theme of the text is therefore we can discuss about its sub-themes).

Morality is another attribution of the teacher, appearing in his relationship with the paratext. Actually it is about the morality of the discourse used by the teacher in order to establish an authentic relationship with the didactic receiver, through the paratextual entity. This attribution manifests through the reactions, the way of transmitting the information and addressing the receiver in an authentic manner resorting to the state of truth and value.

The didactic enunciator has to provide a truthful input that can be scientifically checked (if the enunciator says that Pride and Prejudice is a Victorian novel, this can be checked). He has also to provide information with a moral value, moral emotions that stimulate the perception and the reasoning power. (The enunciator can transmit emotions envisaging patriotic, religious or altruistic feelings: “Let’s say together Our Father who art in Heaven......). By stimulating the receiver’s imagination, the enunciator determines the creation of noble emotions (Ladd, 1932:226) which are part of the affective, moral and pedagogic interior structure of the teacher.

The pedagogic attribution of the teacher determines the construction of a paratext adjacent to the textbook text, by methodological means that re-interpret the paratext’s existence with the purpose of improving the learning process (e.g. the use of the heuristic method of discovering the information in the paratext and other that support the previous through the construction of a logical line. The pedagogical manipulation's role is to distribute the paratextual information in a pleasant and interesting way according to the student's level and to draw upon the understanding and participative communication from the didactic enunciator.

The building of an emergent ideology by the didactic enunciator (About radiations, elements that leave an environment after having crossed it over) leads to the efficiency of the didactic discourse through the making of a system of interpretative development after the crossing over of the contextual environment of the paratext. The theory of the emergent ideology (idealistic and metaphysical theory regarding the development process, according to which the appearance of the new qualities is absolutely spontaneous and unpredictable) (fr emergent, cf. lat emergere, to emerge) applies to the teaching-learning background, referring to the crossing over of the didactic environment of the paratext and the enriching of the interpretation until we get an unpredictable feed-back, like the spontaneous reasoning of the didactic receiver, after having made some connections, being stimulated by the enunciator -teacher. This points out the didactic enunciator's permanent relation with the paratext of the textbook text as well as with the paratext of his own discourse.

The didactic - verbal patterns used by the enunciator when he resorts to the intervention of the paratext in the process of reinforcement of the taught knowledge is part of the paratextual category of the didactic discourse, just like the initial sketch the teacher has in mind which afterward becomes the lesson plan.

Having mentioned all the symbolizing, setting-up, practicing and exemplification elements of the knowledge, the didactic enunciator turns them into semiotic activities of the discourse, becoming their organizer and coordinator.

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References


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