



## **The constitution of the blind reader in higher education and the image of the other**

### **A constituição do leitor cego do ensino superior e a imagem do outro**

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#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The courses in Higher Education Institutions, in a very general way, have as a conjecture of the goals, the continuity of the literate formation of their academics, especially when considering Inclusive Education. However, it is not difficult to observe that this *continuum* does not always occur, especially for blind academics, subjects of this study. So much so that the difficulties for the inclusion of people with specific needs in HEIs have been manifested since Basic Education (PINHEIRO, 2016).

The educational context in Brazil, in a positive direction, has been undergoing significant changes, such as the increase in the number of enrollments of visually impaired students in universities. According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2012), Brazil has about 16 million people with some level of visual impairment, and in 2019,

2,598 blind students were enrolled in Higher Education, according to the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP, 2020). For Vygotsky (1987, p. 54), "[...] it is important that education is oriented towards full social validity and considers it as a real and determining point, and not that it is nourished by the idea that the blind are condemned to less value", which leads us to reflect on the inclusion of blind students in Higher Education.

Considering that reading and writing are complex cognitive skills and that the degree of demand in Higher Education is higher, requiring autonomy and interaction through reading, how is the involvement and performance of university students who encounter sensory difficulties to read, as is the case of the blind? We assume, by analogy, that if academic literacy practices do not occur smoothly for students without disabilities, students with specific educational needs will demonstrate significant difficulties related



to reading and understanding texts, which will be maximized by the lack of accessibility.

Therefore, like any other student, the blind student needs to feel included in the academic discursive domain. This inclusion is permeated, to a large extent, by his constitution as a reader subject and by the images he produces of the agents that surround him - the institution, the teachers and his colleagues -, composing a mosaic of belonging or displacement from Higher Education.

## 2 OBJECTIVE

Discuss how blind academics constitute readers in Higher Education, considering *images of the other* (institution, teachers and colleagues) as the foundations of this constitution.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

The guiding principles and procedures adopted in this research allow us to value the reliability of the information, through an immersion in the researched reality and the possibility of its transformation from the researcher's view as a social, active being, capable of creating (GAMBOA, 2006; MÉSZAROS, 2008). Therefore, we adopted a qualitative study, which allowed a "wide theoretical-methodological freedom to carry out its study" (TRIVIÑOS, 1987, p. 133).

According to the author, "[...] the semi-structured interview is one of the main means ~~the~~ the investigator has to perform data collection" (TRIVIÑOS, 1987, p. 145-146). For this reason, the data collection of this research occurred through a semi-structured interview recorded in audio and video, with four blind students identified in the Student Management System, from the State University of Montes Claros (Unimontes), *locus of the research*, located in the north of the State of Minas Gerais. We emphasize that, during the interview, the students were encouraged to narrate reading experiences at the university, offering an understanding of their reading history through the *other* (institution, teachers and colleagues) in the academic discursive domain.

In this sense, we opted for the life narrative as a method, since it collects in the discourse the life history of the research participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2011, p. 12) understand "that narrative is both the phenomenon being investigated and the method of investigation. 'Narrative' is the name of that quality which structures the experience to be studied". Thus, the life narrative of these students made it possible to understand the life experience of blind academics imbricated in their training as readers.



The research was based on the theoretical contribution of Inclusive Education, to think about blind people in Higher Education, and Textual Linguistics, to discuss reading from this perspective. It was also necessary to make incursions into French Discourse Analysis to outline the image of the *other* constructed by the research participants.

As the research consists of the participation of blind students, we chose not to select blind students enrolled in the 1st or 2nd period of Unimontes courses, since these stages were attended exclusively remotely, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. For this reason, the non-participation of these students in various situations of interaction in the academic discursive domain could compromise the information necessary for the analysis of how they constitute reading subjects at the university. Thus, the research participants totaled 04 blind students enrolled from the 3rd to the 6th period of the undergraduate courses in Physical Education, Letters/Portuguese and Pedagogy, who identified themselves as "congenitally blind". However, after individual dialogues, it was found that 02 of the respondents consider themselves congenitally blind, due to having lost their sight as a result of congenital diseases, although they have seen at some point in their lives.

To maintain the anonymity of the research participants, we have assigned pseudonyms to each of them: Joana, Joaquim, João and José.

#### **4 DEVELOPMENT**

People with disabilities increasingly seek autonomy and the elimination of any kind of prejudice, however, the challenges are not only related to pedagogical demands, but also to the interpersonal issues faced by individuals with disabilities in their daily lives. In this sense, the understanding that a person with a disability is one who has a long-term impediment of a physical, mental, intellectual or sensory nature (BRASIL, 2015) does not prevent us from looking at them beyond their specific needs. These people are able to develop other skills/senses in both the physical and human dimensions, such as the blind who are able to improve the senses of hearing, touch and should not be seen as incapable, but as a person who interacts with the world around them in a unique way.

In this sense, the inclusion of Higher Education through the constitution of blind academics as subjects of reading is shown as an expedient that will help Higher Education institutions to better know and understand this category of students. In this way, the institution will be able to welcome them and direct them better, understanding that disability is not a meaning of incapacity and opposing ableism in Higher Education.



Capacitism is materialized by prejudiced and discriminatory actions and attitudes that hierarchize people according to their functional capacities related to their bodies through an ideal of beauty and perfection (MELLO, 2016).

Regarding the schooling of students with disabilities at all levels of study, especially in Higher Education, we consider, in this research, the conception of person with disability described in Law No. 13,146/2015, which establishes the Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, known as the Statute of Persons with Disabilities (EPD):

**Art. 2** A person with a disability is considered to be one who has a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment, which, in interaction with one or more barriers, may obstruct their full and effective participation in society on equal terms with other people (BRASIL, 2015).

As well as the EPD, Law No. 9.394/96, Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) (BRASIL, 1996) provides the duties and rights regarding the inclusion of these students and has aroused interest of study by several authors, such as Sasaki (1997), Stainback and Stainback (1999), among others. However, according to Camargo and Nardi (2008), when it comes to people with visual impairment, most studies discuss the teaching-learning processes, without necessarily focusing on the blind student subject.

Therefore, when discussing reading and its importance for the constitution of the academic reader, especially the blind student, and considering that, in addition to the acquisition of knowledge, reading is related to the creation of world images and implies who we are, since it is "in language and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject" (BENVENISTE, 2006, p. 286). Thus, what makes the academic reader are the instances of discourse in which we perceive the subjective experience through interaction and interlocution with the other. The literacy of the blind student represents his recognition as an autonomous academic subject, since it is "in the instance of discourse in which the 'I' designates the speaker, that the latter announces himself as 'subject'" (BENVENISTE, 2006, p. 288).

Antunes and Pauliukonis (2018) understand that the analysis of *ethos* allows us to unveil the ways in which meanings are established in the linguistic exchange. Thus, the search for the other's adherence to our ideas is very relevant. According to the authors, the communicative interaction presupposes not only considering the image that the enunciator gives of himself, but also that which is constructed of the other. In the case of blind academics, we consider it relevant to understand how they construct the other - and



their possible contributions or omissions - in this process of constituting their reading subjectivation.

For this process of constituting the image of the other, Charaudeau (2009) presupposes the existence of an individual inscribed in the discourse that includes the concept of exchange between partners of the communicative act. Thus the image of oneself is only possible when there is awareness of the other in the discourse. In this regard, Benveniste (2006) considers that "this condition of dialog is what is constitutive of the *person*, because it implies reciprocity - that I become *you* in the speech of the one who in turn is designated by *me*" (BENVENISTE, 2006, p. 286).

In this direction, we consider the proposal of Discourse Analysis, which turns to the analysis of discursivity, defined as a place of textualization of the political-ideological positions occupied by subjects, historically determined. In this sense, the work of interpretation is not guided by the question "what does it mean?", but by the description of "how does it mean?" for each subject inscribed in different historically determined discursive positions.

Therefore, according to Pêcheux (1990), the discourse produced by a subject presupposes a recipient who is in a particular place in the structure of a social formation. This place appears represented in the discourse that will designate the images that the subject makes of his own place and the place of the other, as Orlandi (2007, p. 16) states: "[it is] by reference to the discursive formation that we can understand, in the discursive functioning, the different meanings. Equal words can mean differently because they are inscribed in different discursive formations".

Thus, the discursive formation identified in the speech of blind students mobilizes a discursive functioning that makes it possible to perceive the image of the other in their discourse.

The following excerpts seek to highlight the *image of the other* produced by the research participants, considering as such the university institution itself, the teachers and the colleagues, in order to catch how they are constructed in the midst of the reflections on the reading process of each participant.

**01** [...] NUSI even started recording some audio books, but we found a lot of problems in converting the audios. They were audios full of effects, they were texts without tonality. It even reminded me of when you taught us, I even had a text of yours that was converted in an incoherent way. Their conversion was not very accessible. I found their conversion very bad, it is a very artificial voice as if it were that computer voice. This way they tried to adapt did not work (JOSÉ, 2021).



**02** During the course, I really relied on NUSI and, thus, I arranged with my colleague to study and, towards the end of the course, I managed to buy the computer. But the computer at that time did not yet have the accessibility it has today, not all the materials I had access to because when I scanned, sometimes the reading was bad or there was that question of images, today it still does not read much

**03** [...] I always tried to be behind the teacher so I could get the text in advance, sometimes I could, sometimes not. When I couldn't, it was this strategy of being able to understand the text in the teacher's explanation, but this I had been doing for a long time, since before I arrived here at the university (JOÃO, 2021).

In excerpt 01, José attributes relevance to the Inclusive Society Center (NUSI) of Unimontes and to the teacher. This demonstrates the constitution of *the image of the other* and refers us to Maingueneau (2008) when he says that the *other* is not a localizable fragment or the figure of an interlocutor. The *other* is "that part of meaning that the discourse had to sacrifice to constitute its identity" (MAINGUENEAU, 2005, p. 39).

Thus, in excerpt 01, José's discourse indicates that, without the *other* - university and teacher

- there is no discursive identity, in which this other is diluted in the blind student for the constitution of his own image.

Considering that there is no discourse that is not affected by memory and historicity, much less discourse without interdiscourse, we observe that Joana's speech is permeated by the *other* when she says: "*During the course, I really counted on NUSI and, thus, I agreed with my colleague to study [...]*". Therefore, the student constitutes the *image of the other* from her memory and historicity in the university, in this case, institution and colleague, and this discourse is born imbricated in a dialogical relationship with others that prevents, according to Maingueneau (2008, p. 19), that the discourse is like a "dispersion of ruins".

Joana's speech stands out: "[...] *not all materials I had access to because when I scanned, sometimes the reading was bad [...]*" (JOANA, 2021). The accessibility favored by the *other* arising from technology is still precarious in the face of limitations.

We observe in João's discourse the modification of the form in which he takes the discourse, since it is not autonomous, closed in on itself. Since it is in relation to other discursive formations that discourse is constituted, the student demonstrates the composition of the teacher's image as inaccessible, when he says: "*I always tried to get behind the teacher so I could get the text in advance, sometimes I would get the text in advance.*"



This discourse is formed within the interdiscourse inscribed in the perspective of a constitutive heterogeneity, which is not marked on the linguistic surface (MAINGUENEAU, 2008).

We found in the data of excerpts 01, 02 and 03 three figures of *another*: the one who seeks to help, but does not always succeed (NUSI) and the help works transitorily (temporarily), the colleague, the one whose support appears as a "crutch" and the teacher, who supports the absence of the text.

In excerpt 04 we continue discussing the constitution of the image of the blind reader from the image of the other, especially the teacher.

**04** My teachers contributed by going back to the topic, for example, when I asked to repeat it again, then they went back to the topic, spoke, tried to explain and then, through the explanation, I tried to understand what they were saying, and they are talking seeing that I am still at university (JOANA, 2021).

In the discourse above, Joana (excerpt 04) highlights the flexibility of teachers to return to the topic or even repeat the explanation of the text. This support in the teacher's oral explanation for understanding the texts produced in the blind academic the feeling of belonging to the academic discursive domain. Here we see the classroom scenography overlapping in a clear definition of teacher-student roles.

According to Maingueneau (2006), the scenography is "[...] at the same time the source of discourse and what it engenders; it legitimizes an utterance that, in turn, must legitimize it, establishing that this scenography where speech is born is precisely the scenography required to enunciate as it should" (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p. 87-88). Thus, the "classroom" scenography is not only a scenario, it is the enunciation that, when developed, constituted the discursive *ethos of* the student Joana "university student" from the *other* present in the scene of enunciation when stating: "*and they are talking seeing that I am still at university*" (JOANA, 2021).

Next, we will focus on how colleagues contribute or not to the projection of *themselves* as reading subjects. The answers were distributed in excerpts 05 and 06.

**05** So, there we started with a good volume, they helped even through group work. And, this application that we use, it is an application that, sometimes, we think it bothers the person next to us. So, when it was group work, I always went into a different group so as not to be in that same group. So, I can say that the whole class, in a way, contributed with me in this part (JOSÉ, 2021).



06 My colleagues also read a lot to me and still do today. Today they, I think because they talk a lot about issues related to inclusion, accessibility, today they are more concerned. They do readings, they describe images, they do text readings. Try to help in one way or another. Right now, when we are in the pandemic, they ask me if it is calm, if I am able to keep up, if everything is fine. That's how it goes. And what I can't, I'll ask them too (JOANA, 2021).

We observed in José's words that his colleagues were helpful and did help him. However, due to the use of an application to perform the readings, this participant was concerned not to disturb the other. Thus, based on Maingueneau (2006, p. 270), we establish the relationship that this

The student constitutes the *ethos* of "deprived" due to the imbrication between a pre-discursive *ethos* (deprivation) and a discursive *ethos*, said and shown (discomfort), with the association of stereotypes arising from this visual impairment. For the author, the identity must be in accordance with the scene of enunciation that manifests in his discourse and that, consequently, must be validated at the same time as it builds it.

Using studies on social representations, we can not only understand, but also identify the way people interpret the world in which they are inserted. Therefore, we realize that the speech of student Joana (excerpt 06) points to the difference in the attitude of her colleagues in the previous period, due to greater knowledge about the inclusion of people with disabilities, so much so that, in this same speech, the student mentions a certain concern on the part of colleagues during remote activities.

In this sense, the constitution of *the image of the other* is related, according to Charaudeau (2006), also to social representations, since these representations are mechanisms of construction of the real that allow to know the reality outlined by social knowledge, which are "ways of saying" and help the construction of thought about the world, or rather, about the subjects in the world.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study focused on the relevance of understanding reading as one of the determining factors for the inclusion of blind students in higher education and, consequently, for their academic literacy process. In this relationship, understanding how this student becomes a reader in a discursive domain in which reading determines his access to knowledge or even his metaphorical exclusion from this environment, implies knowing the perception of the image that the blind student reader constitutes of the other (teacher, colleagues and institution), given that the knowledge circulating in the





university is conveyed mainly in written form.

In this sense, the analyzes allowed us to observe that the image of the *other* is changed according to the needs of the blind student, especially when demanding the help of the teacher and the colleague in activities related to reading. This new discursive relationship leads the blind student to review his perception of *the other* and change the *image of the other* previously constituted, so that it favors his permanence in Higher Education as a subject of knowledge and, consequently, most of the research participants begin to constitute the *ethos* of university and gratitude in their speeches.

In this discursive perspective, comparing the period of entry into higher education and the present moment, students consider themselves more capable and prepared in relation to academic training. However, even with an improved view of themselves as readers, these students are not exempt from the need to improve their reading competence.

Taking into account the *image of the other*, in this case, of the institution, it is important to emphasize how NUSI is evidenced by two blind students as the only inclusion action of the institution, and the other two students did not demonstrate to know the center, probably because they study outside the *campus. headquarters*. In other words, the *image of the other*, in this case, the institution, is not fully constituted before the participants, since this nucleus is the only inclusion policy that part of the academics know at Unimontes, mimicking NUSI to the institution and the institution to NUSI. Regarding NUSI, it is highlighted in the students' speeches that, although the center intends to advise them, it does not always have the material condition to do so.

In general, we realize that the feelings of the participants are distinct, however, it is clear that without the *other* - teachers, colleagues and NUSI - the *self* is not sustained as it is. We see that this *other* is diluted in the blind student for the constitution of his own image, and colleagues seem to be the strongest element among those mentioned, as they position themselves not only as an "accessibility resource", but as someone who cares about their training and contributes significantly to their permanence in Higher Education.



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