

REVIEW

# Literature, language and teaching: teachers and reader's formation in an applied perspective

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ABSTRACT

The conference *Literature, Linguistics and Teaching*, given by Prof. Dr. Marisa Lajolo (UNICAMP / MACKENZIE), proposed the discussion of dialogues between literature and linguistics in the critical formation of language teachers. It was intended to reflect on these two great areas that currently occur in the courses of Letters in Brazil, to dialogue about how to apply the teaching, it can reverberate the direct instructions and use in the training of readers and freelancers, either in teacher training courses or in basic education. In view of this, topics of interest to areas of Applied Linguistics and Applied Education, such as (a) policies educational evaluation in regard to reading; (b) conceptions of reading and the place of this practice in Brazilian daily life; (c) state of the art of language and literacy teacher training in a critical perspective; and (d) objects of literary reading today.

RESUMO

A conferência *Literatura, Linguística e Ensino*, ministrada pela Prof.<sup>a</sup> Dra. Marisa Lajolo (UNICAMP/MACKENZIE), propôs-se à discussão de diálogos entre literatura e linguística na formação crítica de professores de línguas. Teve como intuito a reflexão de como essas duas grandes áreas que balizam atualmente os cursos de Letras no Brasil, ao dialogarem de modo aplicado ao ensino, podem reverberar intervenções diretas e eficazes na

formação de leitores críticos e autônomos, seja nos cursos de formação docente, seja na educação básica. Em vista disso, abordaram-se tópicos de interesse às áreas de Linguística Aplicada e Educação, tais como (a) políticas de avaliação educacional no tocante à leitura; (b) concepções de leitura e o lugar desta prática no cotidiano de brasileiros; (c) estado da arte da formação de professores de línguas e literaturas em uma perspectiva crítica; e (d) objetos do letramento literário na atualidade.

### KEYWORDS

Reading. Language teacher training. Literacies.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Leitura. Formação de professores de Línguas. Letramentos.

The mistaken idea that reading has become an increasingly obsolete practice in the face of the various media alternatives offered by the technological age seems to be consensual. Such a skewed conception, however, is not exclusive to the 21st century: already in the 19th century, around the 1880s, a somewhat biased discourse began to be constructed regarding the valuation of prestigious reading practices, although for reasons not as contemporary as technology (LAJOLO; ZILBERMAN, 1996).

It is, therefore, in this intention that the conference *Literature, Linguistics and Teaching*, given by Marisa Lajolo, is defined: the search for a current debate, supported by critical considerations present in the works *Literature yesterday, today and tomorrow* (LAJOLO, 2018) and *The Formation of reading in Brazil* (ZILBERMAN; LAJOLO, 2019), about the main obstacles in the training of teachers and critical readers citizens. For that, the speech was divided into the following points: first, results of evaluative research on reading were contemplated; secondly, concepts of reading were approached in order to reflect on the place of this practice in Brazilian daily life; thirdly, critical considerations were developed on the state of the art of language and literacy teacher training; and, finally, the fourth moment focused on the proposition of literary literacy objects printed in teaching practices.

In the first moment of his speech, Lajolo exposes the results of the International Student Assessment Program (ISAP)<sup>1</sup>, through which it seeks to structure reflections on reading in Brazil. According to the information brought up by the researcher, the Brazil, which in 2018 was in 57th position among 79 evaluated countries, had an average of 1.7 books per inhabitant<sup>2</sup>. Still, it was detailed that of the 350 million copies of 46,828 titles included in the 2018 results, 175 million were didactic works and 68 million religious works, being 10,726 and 6,451 titles in each category, respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at : <http://portal.inep.gov.br/pisa>. Accessed: aug 8th 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The exact ratio is 350 million examples per 200 million inhabitants (cf. ISAP, 2018).

Based on these data, which lead to an interpretation of a decrease in the number of readers among the audience covered by ISAP, Lajolo proposes the following questions to teachers and researchers in the field of languages and literature: can it be taken like true that people are reading less, or the researches assess a type of reading that is not the dominant one? How does the evaluation of hypermedia readings, such as those taken on smartphones, tablets, etc? Notably, such provocations allude to topics of interest in numerous researches developed in the scope of Applied Linguistics and represent the essential character of understanding the different forms of reading for the teaching-learning process from the perspective of critical literacies (SILVA. 2016; TAKAKI; MONTE MOR, 2017).

The questions raised by the speaker lead her to the second point of her debate: the search for a definition of reading that considers the plurality of languages and intertextualities and does not stop at excluding paradigms. In this sense, Lajolo argues that the act of reading is not restricted to the mere decoding of verbal language, but also expands to the domain of nonverbal and raises recruitment of interpretive skills influenced by different factors (e.g. knowledge of the world, cultural determinants, agreements implicit pragmatists etc).

In this point of his discussion, Lajolo even demonstrates that reading practices have long been associated with a utopian prestige that seems to be consolidated in a relation of dystopia among Brazilian culture. Thus, she uses three examples: two from the 19th century and one from the 21st century.

The first is a publication dated March 24, 1872, in the newspaper *Diário do RJ*, in which the famous Brazilian literary Machado de Assis criticizes the situation of low publication of books, judging as inferior the types of readings that would not be romances.

The second, from an 1889 article, published in *Revista Brasileira*, in which there are hints of ongoing values in 19th century society, conceiving the idea that the Brazilian people would not be prepared to consume the book and embracing sexist speeches, to the extent in which observed the book as “substantial food for manly and highly valued organizations” and the reading as a practice that would demand a long breath.

Finally, there is the example of this century, of the year 2018<sup>3</sup>, in which, when presenting the results of a survey that considers that 44.0% of Brazilians do not read and 30.0% never bought a book<sup>4</sup>, it is stated that “the practice of reading is not yet fully present among Brazilians”, similarly to the examples of 1872 and 1889.

After critically appraising the questionable conceptions regarding the habit of reading in Brazilian society, Lajolo goes on to the third point of his conference, in which she debates the training of professional teachers in the area of Language and Literature in Brazil. At this point, the researcher uses data collected by INEP, which demonstrate the number of colleges authorized to offer Language and Literature Graduations, as well as the number of graduate programs that represent the interdisciplinarity of this field. The table below summarizes the data presented by the author:

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3 Available at: <[www.edicaodobrasil.com.br](http://www.edicaodobrasil.com.br)>. Accessed: aug 8th 2020.

4 This survey, according to the conference, considers who read a book, in whole or in parts, in the 3 months prior to the survey.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE GRADUATIONS			
Colleges authorized to offer the Language and Literature course in 2017	Enrollment in Professors Formation of Language and Literature Vernacular	Enrollment in Professors Formation of Language and Literature Modern Foreign	Enrollment in Professors Formation of Language and Literature: Double habilitation
	78.912	44.099	41.574
500	Total: 164.585		
GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE			
Number of programs in 2020	Academic Master	Academic Doctorate	Professional Master
265	150	105	10

TABLE 1- Data of courses in Letras.  
Source: Our production.

In view of the quantitative panorama of the training and qualification courses for professionals in the area of Language and Literature, the essential intersection between literary studies and linguistic studies for the training of critical readers is brought to the fore, with the objective of teaching the training of other critical readers. In order to explain this proposition, Lajolo mentions the strong tendency to discuss bakhtinian studies and discourse analysis in these courses, topics of interest to both Linguistics and Literature<sup>5</sup>. Thus, she considers that the current training of students of Language and Literature favors naturally interdisciplinary topics, which fulfill with the purpose of promoting an illuminating look at the different forms of language expression in society.

Finally, at the last moment, the lecturer exposes possibilities of using evaluation as an instrument to promote critical literacy in Language and Literature courses. As an example, she uses an activity in which undergraduate students of the Language and Literature course must assume authoritative and autonomous collaborative roles in the construction of a Literature booklet for High School. In addition, Lajolo exposes recommendations made to his advisors in post-graduate instances, of which they are requested: (a) a text for scientific dissemination (for undergraduate and post-graduate students) and (b) proposals for activities inspired by his researches for Basic Education.

At the end of his speech, his interaction with the public was marked by questions related to teacher training, such as: the way in which evaluative exams and teaching materials have treated the literary text, the space for working with Literature from possibilities presupposed by BNCC, the

<sup>5</sup> The author also mentions the strong brand of works such as *Aesthetics of Reception* (1989) and *Cultural Studies* (1998).

specialization of language teaching<sup>6</sup>, difficulties presented by students regarding oral reading and reading classics, among others. In general, Lajolo's responses enriched the debate about pedagogical practice and literacy practices today.

In fact, the questions raised by the conference given by Lajolo call attention to the mistake of thinking about the development of reading as a practice closed in literacy, since, as pointed out by Jouve (2002, p. 17), "the reading is a complex, plural activity that develops in several dimensions". This conception leads us to think about the obstacles that are put to teaching practice in Languages and Literature, mainly: how to promote, in an educational dynamic strongly marked by quantitative and traditional aspects, the encounter with the pleasure of critical reading?

As Câmara (2012) warns us, the reading choices for work in Basic Education should be considered under cautious points of view, since instead of bringing the student closer to the reading practice, it can have opposite effects, in order to keep them away. Furthermore, specifically on the teaching of Literature, Soares (2009) claims that reading the classics should not be proposed as something that provides only entertainment, but as a fundamental cultural artifact to society. In this sense, the reading of isolated fragments, in addition to not being effective in this regard, removes possibilities for students to construct literary literacy.

In short, such questions, which are lodged in both linguistic and literary studies, are crucial to the development of agents (trans)former of critical readers.

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6 As for the specialization of teaching, Lajolo classifies the tendency to separate one teacher for literature, another for writing and another for Portuguese.

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