The Discursive Construction of Subjectivities in the Space of Virtualities

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Abstract: *This article, produced from the conclusions arising from the research developed during the master's degree on the discursive construction of homoaffetive Bear within gay culture, intends to broaden the discussion around issues whose approach there were treated less punctually. Among the points indicted as a result of the research, that due to its historical and consequently discursive constitution, the bear as a homoaffective subject is cleaved by several places of enunciators such as the conventional gay, the heterosexual will be the starting point for the discussion. We resorted to Michel Foucault's theoretical formulations about the subject.*

Keywords: Subjectivities, Discourse, Virtuality, Bear

1. Introduction

This text was produced from the conclusions arising from the research I developed during the master's degree in Linguistics at UFPB [1] on the *discursive construction of the homoaffetivebear within the gay culture*. With the end of the work, there was a need to broaden the discussion around issues whose approach there had been less punctual.

Among the points indicted as a result of the research, that "due to its historical and consequently discursive constitution, the bear as a homoaffective subject is cleaved by several other places of enunciators such as the conventional gay, the heterosexual male and his masculinity hegemonic" (DOMINGOS, 2010) will be the starting point for the discussion we propose in this article. To re - discuss the condition of the bear as a hiatus, dispersed subject, we use the theoretical formulations of the French Discourse Analysis on the subject, establishing a dialogue with Michel Foucault's writings on subjectivities.

Based on this, here we will discuss how the image of the homoaffetivebear is subjectively constructed, considering the virtual space of a social networking site as a discursive domain. The analysis applies to the *profile* model suggested by the *social* networking site *ursos. com. br* to its users.

The subject in Discourse Analysis
The first procedure to deal with the subject of Discourse Analysis (DA) is to separate him from that centered, autonomous and conscious subject of the Enlightenment. Quoting Possenti (2004), "For DA, there is no speaker, no announcer, much less emitter. There is a subject (alternatively enunciator). Which is, of course, in the wake of the breaks with Pragmatics and with the dominant linguistic theories, another break, perhaps the most important for the theory". This precept is very outlined in Louis Althusser's rereading of Marxist theory, fleeing from the historical heritage of humanism. Another theorist who corroborates the subject's thinking as decentered is Lacan. This reinterpreting Freud abandons the subject of reason to the detriment of a subject of the unconscious. Closing the basic trinomial revisited in the construction of a theory of the subject in DA, Saussure stands out, whose linguistic

theory enabled Michel Pêcheux's critique when he saw the subject as, above all, determined by language and history.

In view of this epistemological data, whatever perspective one takes to approach it, one must always consider that such approaches invariably point to a hiatus and unfinished subject; occurrence of interpretations of the equation: **Marx - Freud - Saussure.** Of these three names that defined the epistemological basis of DA idealized by Michel Pêcheux, the first was the reason for more than a decade of controversies between Foucault and Pêcheux, especially with regard to ideology and class struggle not mentioned in Foucault's theses.

Michel Foucault does not consider the subject of the statement as reduced to grammatical elements, since it is historically determined. This historical determination allows the *enunciative function to* be occupied by different subjects. Foucault (2008, p.105) wrote: "A single and the same individual can occupy, alternately, in a series of statements, different positions and assume the role of different subjects". It is worth mentioning the question posed by Gregolin (2007): "How does the subject mark his presence when mobilizing material forms in discursive production? How, in the forms, are the places and positions of the subjects constituted?"

It is possible to observe on the website in question, the functioning of the materiality of the language permeating the subject. The lexical choice in the *profile* title itself is an index of its subjective position: as most users of the site do not use their own name in their profile, the *nickname* created in the presentation starts to function as a discursive element of this subject. Thus, there are certain terms that recur in profiles such as *bear, male, man, fat, mature, crown,* or some English counterparts such as *bear, man, fat, boy.* Through discursive practices, bears repeat the male heterosexual matrix, albeit as a resistance within the homo - affective context (DOMINGOS, 2010).

For Foucault, the subject is not in a position *una* in discourse, these positions, subject (which culminate in subjective processes / subject identification) exist as the "dispersion". It is at this point that his theory of discourse

embraces the subject and history. Thus, the subject is not at the origin of his speech: it is the speech that determines what the subject should say; therefore, the subject does not preexist the discourse, he is a construction in the discourse, which is a bundle of relationships that will determine what to say, when and in what way (NAVARRO - BARBOSA, 2004, p.113).

In the text of my dissertation I discussed the difficulty for the bear movement to establish itself as an identity precisely because of its dispersed character. On the bears website this is particularly evident in the bears *menu* that the website presents [2]. Once *logged in*, it is up to the user to identify himself as one of the types. It is also necessary to "choose" the sexual orientation. And here what stands out the most is appearing alongside the already conventional hetero, homo, and bi, the *curious* term as an option for sexual orientation. How would a "curious" sexual orientation be characterized? Although there is no answer to this question, it is possible to understand it as a discursive practice specific to the field of virtualities[1], which in this case would be the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a statement about *curious* sexual orientation.

Regarding when and how to say the discourses, in *The order of discourse (*2008) Foucault determines the subject to the order of power: the same subject that may come to be marked in different positions, only does so from a system of interdiction, in procedures that create a game of borders, limits that try to control what the subject says socially. In the text of *The Words and Things (*2000), the illustrious son of Poitiers makes this articulation between the subject and History better understood. There, the author shows how the utopian subject, a thinking being, designed by the chimerical mind of the Enlightenment, is a dated subject and whose end is inevitable. Modernly there is no subject who knows, but who can be known, by what he does and what he says.

About the interdiction system to which the speeches are submitted, in the discursive sphere of the website, it operates in different forms of language. The most explicit is the absence of a profile photo. Only 45% of the more than 30, 000 profiles registered on the site have a personal photo (including profiles with blurry images or just body parts). As it is a site aimed at the gay public and with free access, most prefer not to show their own faces, fearing prejudice or for other personal reasons. However, as it is impossible to show the main element of identification of the subject, the face is replaced by other parts of the body, causing a displacement of meaning around the identity.

Another form of interdiction in the bears' discourse appears in the item *constitution* that characterizes the physical type of the bear. Of the total, 58% total those classified as *fat*, *chubby*, *very fat*, *muscular*, *stout* or *standard*. All of these are physical types that meet the order of speech of the bears, in which it is not possible to say the same for the *thin ones*, which on the website are only 4% of those who declared. It

[1]In this text, we are using this term not in the sense of potentialities, or what can become. But we are referring to the processes of social and communicative interaction established through the digital supports of the cyber space.

was also observed that in the enunciated title of the profiles there are practically no records of expressions such as gay or homosexual, reinforcing that the discourses are always regulated.

The circumscription of the subject to History as treated in Analysis Discourse allows the work developed here to understand the idea of a homosexual subject today. To what extent has this subject's discourse determined his position or condition throughout history? Considering the approach taken by Edward Macrea (1990), that "it makes no sense to think of an essence common to all subjects who are labeled as homosexual and that can serve to differentiate them from those socially considered as heterosexual", it is possible to have a interpretation of how the interdiction system that selects homoaffective discourses works, as well as the discursive practices that particularize them, as in the case of the bear.

Macrea's thinking is echoed in the diversity of sexual performances that the site lists. It is problematic to think of fixed positions since, in addition to the traditional active/passive ones, it is *versatile*, *versatile more for active*, *versatile more for passive*, *without penetration* as the site brings. In these terms, a subjective essentiality or a sexual practice that is based on naturalness cannot be conceived. On the other hand, all this fluidity with which the bear configures itself on the website seems to dilute it along with any need for naming subjectivity. I will still deal with this question of naming.

In order to demonstrate Foucault's idea of the discursive subject as a historical event, one can think, for example, when in the XIX century sexuality came to compose what this author called the *nationalization of the biological*, that is, as a behavior, sexuality depended of an individualizing disciplinary control, in the form of permanent surveillance; after all, no other device was placed so well between the body and the population, the main places of action of the disciplinary power. How was it possible to control the sexuality of individuals? Discursing it: once sexuality was put into discourse (which implies practices), different subjects began to exist and to speak of certain positions based on sexuality:

[. . .] the medical idea according to which sexuality, when it is undisciplined and irregular, always has two orders of effects: one on the body, on the undisciplined body that is immediately punished for all the sexual diseases that the sexual wanton attracts about you. But at the same time, a wanton, perverted sexuality, etc. it has effects at the level of the population, since the one who was sexually debauched is supposed to have a heredity, an offspring that will also be disturbed, and this for generations and generations, in the seventh generation, in the seventh of the seventh. (FOUCAULT, 1999, p.301)

For now, it is necessary to understand how Foucault thinks the subject with whom Discourse Analysis is concerned; its event in given space and time, but always juxtaposed to other spaces and epochs, at the same time a dispersed one, which unites the near with the distant, the continuum of the discontinuous. Differently from traditional History, in its

linearity, defending a sovereign subject, the philosopher defends a historical design hatched in its dispersion and discontinuity where the subject emerges, despite the places of silencing and interdictions.

In addition to history, another way to understand the discursive subject is through psychoanalysis. Freud, through Lacan, integrates the epistemological tripod of DiscursiveAnalysis proposed by Pêcheux. For AD, it must be considered that there is no intentionality in the speech, because the subject does not control, all the time, the meanings of what he says. The subject of the Freudian I is rethought in Lacanian Psychoanalysis through the bias of the unconscious, which is structured as a language. DiscursiveAnalysis starts from the psychoanalytic interpretation that "through the instrument of language a certain number of stable relationships are established within which something much broader can certainly be inscribed, which goes much further than effective utterances".

Supported by this Pecheuxtian interpretation, DA recognizes this decentering of the subject (in addition to the historical decentering as proposed by Foucault), based on its crossing into the place of the unconscious. This finding has been important for research in DiscursiveAnalysis today to admit this erasure of the ideological foundation in discussions about language. The notion of *resistance*, as thought by Pêcheux through the lens of Psychoanalysis, illustrates well the relation of the unconscious with the non - evidence of the subject - center - of - meaning.

The notion of resistance as Ferreira exposes in *From ambiguity to misunderstanding* (2000) begins with Pêcheux pointing to the fact that, like the subject, language is characterized by an opacity that is constitutive of it. He (the subject) produces language at the same time that it is produced by it in discursive practices within a discursive formation: "it is a work that is situated on the margin between the domination of language and the one it establishes. The traditional polarity that places the language sometimes as a servant, sometimes as a mistress of thought". This theorization about the resistance in/of the language and the subject will flow in the order of the symbolic when touching the *real of the language*.

The real is what cannot be said by language (by the system), but is apprehended by discursiveness, that is, by the order of the symbolic; this is the representation of the real of language by language; the real is opposed to the symbolic and vice versa. The real of language, according to Milner (1989), consists in the impossibility of saying everything in language, but it is also what is most appropriate to it. Access to the impossible is given by the possible – it is in the possible that the point of "failure, misunderstanding, etc. " can be grasped. – it is often said that 'words are missing'. . . " (FERREIRA, 2000, p.26). "The misunderstanding appears as the point where the (linguistic) impossible comes to unite with the (historical) contradiction – this is the meeting point where language touches history" (GADET and PÊCHEUX, 1984, p.63 - 64).

This triple affectation of the subject by history, language and the unconscious, as exposed in the previous paragraphs, appears, above all, in the statements with which these subjects name themselves in the website *profiles*. The *discreet*, the *secretive*, the *lover are common*. When observed within the socio - historical reality in which they are circulating, in this case a gay relationship address, these linguistic elements allow the production of meanings. Considering the gay condition as a historically prohibited practice, the discursive strategy of the *discreet*, *the secretive* is understood. It is even more reinforced by such a commonplace practice in the gay sphere of virtualities that concerns the denial of the effeminate, passive, *flashy*, in short, "not very manly". Referring to certain aspects of Brazilian culture, we were able to make sense of other elements of the language present in titles such as *black*, *black man*, *brown*. Here, historical memory triggers a chain of already - said about the black man as being potent and sexually well - endowed, as a symbol of an erotic fetish. This is the contact point of the unconscious with history through language.

From this point, we start to consider the bear's subject - position highlighted by the contradiction, the constitutive mark of the discourse. First, it is necessary to consider that, historically, the discursive production around the figure of bears emerged within the gay movement. Bear's identity construction implies her condition of homo - affective. However, as it is posted on the website www.ursos. com. br, there is a variation of this idea, as in *the marital status* item in the user form, we find next to the option "married to a man", others for profiles that claim "married to a woman", "single", "widower". This slippage in the meaning of what characterizes the bear is reinforced in terms *of sexual orientation* by classifying them as straight, homosexuals and bisexuals.

That said, the concept of subject developed by Discourse Analysis of Pecheuxtian affiliation, on which this work is based, was born from the intersection of Marxist, Freudian and Saussurian theories. Its founders were interpreted by Althusser, Lacan, Pêcheux, just to mention these. In these interpretations is Michel Pêcheux's project for a theory of discourse. The name of Michel Foucault, which as already said, has a great contribution with his archeology/genealogy within this formulation.

It is precisely the way in which Foucault problematizes this subject in present society that brings up the issue of identifications and subjectivities that guides the study carried out here on the modes of subjectivation of homo - affectiveness in the current context. The theses of the French philosopher are essential, as he proposed; the theses of the French philosopher are essential, as he proposed; His main objective was to produce a history of the different modes of objectification / subjectivation of the human being in our culture, how the human being is transformed into a subject (1995).

Finally, it is important to ask to what extent the field of virtualities should be considered in the construction of subjectivity in bears? Is cyberspace not just an extension of the domain of everyday social relations? Once answered in the affirmative to this pair of questions, a third one appears: if "being a bear" corresponds to the production of meanings

inferred from the website, which would justify the need for a particular nomination for this set of sexual practices that have already been categorized a priori?

We understand that subjective production in the field of homo - affectiveness requires much more of a work with itself than categorization. In *take care for oneself,* as Foucault (2004, p.254) says: that "it is necessary to occupy oneself with oneself, so that the relationship with others is deduced, implied in the relationship that is established between oneself and oneself". The nominations do not change the subjects' positions, as these remain in the socio - historical memory. But no less important is to understand subjectivities as the product of the different positions that the subject occupies.

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[16] In "The Discourse of the bears: other ways of being of Homoaffectiveness" there is a detailed list of the different types of bears.