

UNEQUAL DISCOURSE RIGHTS IN ADULT LITERACY SITES IN BRAZIL

by
Izabel Magalhães

In contemporary globalized economies, social organization depends significantly on 'intellectual work', on language and literacy abilities. This study examines the negotiation of discourse rights in adult literacy sites in Brazil. In this social process, we will focus on the production of particular discourse-mediated teacher identities as manifested in both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. Close attention is paid to: a) choice of Portuguese varieties; b) the distribution of linguistic knowledge; c) conditions in which unequal discourse rights are problematic to participants; and d) what strategies are available, and how concessions to linguistic differences are handled. The analysis of case studies, based on semi-informal interviews and fieldnotes, suggests the following: heterogeneous teacher identities are constructed, depending on contextual/institutional factors; like teacher identities, discourse rights are always in the process of being constructed; a positive attitude to teacher education has to deal with the issue of how discourse/power difference is handled.

1. Introduction¹

In contemporary globalized economies, social organization depends significantly on intellectual work, on knowledge of language, and on literacy. This study examines the negotiation of unequal discourse rights in adult literacy sites in Brazil. The focus of the study is on how linguistic differences produce inequalities in the context of teaching Portuguese as a mother tongue. Such differences, inasmuch as they concern both teaching and learning how to read and write, are embedded in the field of literacy, which is a social space with positions that are interrelated with literacy resources. The distribution of these resources depends on power relations derived from a historical context that is deeply affected by social inequalities based on class, race, and gender (Chauí 1986; Magalhães 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1996; Moita Lopes 2002).

Close attention is paid to: a) choice of Portuguese language varieties; b) the distribution of linguistic knowledge and pragmatic acts; c) the conditions in which unequal discourse rights are considered problematic to participants; d) the available strategies and the ways concessions to linguistic differences are handled. The analysis of four

case studies, based on semi-informal interviews and field notes, suggests that the struggle for unequal discourse rights between teachers and learners is effectively realized through their negotiation of discursive literacy practices. In such practices, participation patterns and identity positions in literacy sites are dependent on the familiarity of teachers and learners with the varieties of Portuguese.

2. Discursive Literacy Practices: Field and Power

The main theoretical notions called upon in this paper are: 'field', 'power', and 'discourse' (Bourdieu 1991; Bernstein 1996; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). For Bourdieu, people from diverse social classes are different because they have internalized different kinds of dispositions. A particular set of dispositions is called a 'habitus', which accounts for people's practices, attitudes, perceptions, and values; all of these emerge from the relations between the habitus and the individual's social context. When discussing the latter, Bourdieu uses several terms; one of these is 'field'. A field is a social space in which positions are interrelated with the distribution of resources, including the symbolic/linguistic resources which Bourdieu calls 'capital'. A significant point in Bourdieu's work is that one form of capital (for example, linguistic/educational capital) can be transformed into another kind (for example, a profitable job).

A similar concept of 'field' is developed by Bernstein, who to a certain extent adopts Bourdieu's notion. Bernstein, too, is concerned with such aspects as, on the one hand, 'access to positions, position taking, positional distribution, practices and strategies with respect to various capital accumulations', and, on the other, 'the distribution of habituses from which the field selects, sponsors and legitimises' (Bernstein 1996:169). However, Bernstein disagrees with Bourdieu in relation to the 'symbolic system'. According to Bourdieu,

...symbolic power does not reside in 'symbolic systems' in the form of an 'illocutionary force', but ... is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it, i.e. in the very structure of the field in which *belief* is produced

and reproduced. What creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining or subverting the social order, is the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them. And words alone cannot create this belief. (Bourdieu 1991:170)

In contrast to Bourdieu, Bernstein considers words, phrases, clauses, and in general, semiotic elements, to be of significance in the study of power relations. The following quotation illustrates this:

The point to be developed here is whether it is always appropriate to dispense with the 'symbolic system'. Has the internal structure no structuring significance? The form of the specialisation of this symbolic system and the structure of the field may, under certain conditions, interact and so contribute in a fundamental way to the games, practices and strategies. Perhaps we should regard symbolic system and field as parts of one system... (Bernstein 1996:170)

If we agree with Bernstein, then we can say that the study of language and semiosis is relevant to the understanding of literacy practices, which is our main concern in this paper.

Our view of literacy as discourse has much in common with that adopted by Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995, 2000) and with that of the so-called 'New Literacy Studies', as originally proposed by Street (1984, 1993, 1995, 2000) and developed by Gee (1990), Barton (1994), Baynham (1995), Barton and Hamilton (1998), Barton et al. (2000), and Martin-Jones and Jones (2000).

Scholars of diverse theoretical orientations have pointed out the need to examine language and semiosis in the study of contemporary social practices. For Chouliaraki and Fairclough, writing about 'practices of production', such practices 'involve particular people in particular relationships using particular resources – applying "technologies" to "materials" within particular social relations of production' (1999:23). Technologies and materials should be viewed in a broad sense, ranging from physical resources (raw materials) to symbolic resources, like images, photographs, drawings, and the various discourses and genres.

A key concept in Fairclough's work is that of *power*. It is not by chance that Fairclough's first book is entitled *Language and Power* (1989). Note, however, that his view has changed considerably from then to more recent work. 'Power' now figures both in one particular practice and in 'networks of practices', in such a way as to leave space for the agents and the tensions they create, in terms of what Fairclough calls 'permanence' and 'struggle'.

Networks of practices are held in place by social relations of power, and shifting articulations of practices within and across networks are linked to the shifting dynamics of power and of struggles over power. In this sense, the 'permanences' we referred to ... are an effect of power over networks of practice, and the tensions within events between permanences (boundaries) and flows are struggles over power. (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999:24)

Such a view of power in terms of permanence and struggle is of significance for our concern with adult literacy sites. We propose to follow this view of power in the present study of *discursive literacy practices*, which we define as 'historical ways that shape the production and interpretation of spoken and written texts with real addressers and addressees' (Magalhães 1995a). We examine discursive literacy practices in institutional and in local community sites (such as local community associations).

Discursive literacy practices constitute identities, values, and beliefs; this happens in literacy *events*, in which written texts and the ways in which people talk about written texts contribute to shaping social encounters and social relations (Heath 1983). This view of literacy as discourse is also advocated by scholars such as Gee, who notes: 'I believe it is only within the context of the notion of Discourse that we can achieve a viable definition of literacy' (1990:150). For our purpose, discursive literacy practices can be seen as the moments of practices in which discourse as action or representation contributes to the games and strategies of social life (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999).

Our focus is, therefore, on practices, events, and texts. According to Barton and Hamilton (2000:9), these are the fundamental concepts

for the study of literacy practices. Barton and Hamilton subsume the concept of literacy practices in six points:

- a) Literacy is a set of social practices. We can infer practices from events which are constructed around written texts.
- b) Different domains of social life produce different literacies, for example in schools and hospitals.
- c) Literacy practices are embedded in power relations: some literacies are dominant, while others are invisible. This point also underlies Street's discussion of the ideological view of literacy (Street 1995).
- d) Literacy practices have purposes as part of larger cultural practices.
- e) As social practices, literacies are embedded in a historical context.
- f) Literacy practices can change, and informal learning can play a role in the acquisition of new literacies (Barton and Hamilton 2000:8).

Observing that most studies of literacy practices are ethnographic, Street raises a question of both theoretical and methodological interest, viz.: 'How can we characterise the shift from observing literacy events to conceptualising literacy practices?' (2000:22). Street suggests to link local aspects of literacy with broader aspects of social practices, in such a way as to understand 'particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts' (ibid.). For example, in particular cultural contexts, 'mediators of literacy' can be part of the literacy field, while in others, literacy is thought of as a personal skill (Baynham 1995). In adult literacy sites in Brazil, women often mention how their children help them in reading and writing.

These links are crucial in Street's discussion of literacy practices, since he suggests that literacy is 'a field for investigating processes of hegemony, power relations, practices and competing discourses rather than for exploring the great divide and the relative rationality of "modern" and "traditional" societies' (Street 2000:25). In this view, any attempt to divert the study of literacy practices from its due focus on

power and ideology runs the risk of emptying the very notion that is being studied.

In order to understand what is at stake in this debate, let us consider Street's notions of an 'autonomous', as opposed to an 'ideological', view of literacy. The *autonomous* view takes literacy to be a neutral technology, which may have the same effect in different social contexts. This view is based on psychological theories of cognitive development and on social theories of progress from 'traditional' to 'modern' societies (Street 1997:133). According to this view, there is a 'great divide' between oral and literate cultures. Societies in which the oral mode of communication is dominant are taken to lack aspects of what is considered 'modern': for example, the detachment from one's immediate situation, abstract reasoning, and in general, the modern perspective. In the autonomous view, both individuals and societies are believed to benefit from the acquisition of literacy. It is assumed that individuals who acquire literacy have their world views expanded by the ability to juxtapose critically different ideas; by doing so, they will be able to develop scientific thinking. In addition, economic and political institutions are believed to change with the adoption of economic planning and capitalist ways of trading. Such a change is thought to lead to a new world order, in which 'the model offered by western "developed" societies is imitated by "underdeveloped" societies' (Street, *ibid.*). According to Street,

Much of this appears 'natural' in the everyday discourse of many contemporary western societies. Media representations of literacy and its significance pathologise those with difficulties in reading and writing, whether adults or 'failed' school children. Schools are berated for failing the society if literacy levels are seen to fall – by various measures rooted in the autonomous model. The issue of 'falling standards' has dominated public debate about literacy in a number of societies in recent years. Adult literacy campaigns have been created, in both the developed and developing world contexts, to overcome this 'disadvantage' and their publicity tends to reinforce the popular conception of literacy. (1997:134)

Street notes that these ideas are derived from technological determinism, from theories of cognitive development, and from the concept of progress which was inherited from the 18th century European Enlightenment; he also points out the problems inherent in this view, such as its insensitivity to cultural diversity, the narrowness of its economist approach, and its ethnocentric perspective that values western literacies as the only forms of literacy.

As regards the agencies concerned with literacy, like UNESCO, they often subscribe to the autonomous view described above. However, in light of Street's critique, it is necessary to think of an alternative. Here, Street proposes what he calls an *ideological* view of literacy, which takes into account the social practices of reading and writing as they are exercised in particular fields. According to Street (1995:29), the ideological view can be subsumed in the following points:

- a) Literacy practices are ideological, which means that they are culturally embedded. This point is also made by Barton and Hamilton (2000).
- b) The meaning of literacy is constructed socially; hence diverse social institutions are concerned with the construction of this meaning for participants, schooled literacy being just one among other literacies.
- c) There is a distinction between the consequences of literacy in general and what it means to specific social groups.
- d) Subscribing to the ideological view entails being sceptical about claims for the rationality of what is being taught in accordance with this view. This is why the focus of research suggested by Street is on the role of literacy in social control and on power relations.
- e) One significant claim made in this view is that there is a mix between oral and written modes.

Such a view of literacy has much in common with Bernstein's discussion of the notion of 'field' in pedagogic discourse and with Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic power', particularly as regards points (a) and (d), above. As we have seen earlier, unless one considers the

ways in which literacy is embedded in power relations, one can lose sight of what is involved in practices of production, thus weakening the concept of literacy practice (or even voiding it altogether).

Two further points need clarification. They have to do with how literacy practices constitute particular identities and how these identities are shaped by the setting (place and time) and by the specific ways the practices are articulated, in particular the way the ethos of these practices controls the different identities in literacy sites.

With regard to this, Bernstein (1999) discusses recent changes in education in terms of identity positions in official pedagogic discourse. These positions are part of what Bernstein defines as a 'pedagogic identity', which is 'the result of embedding a career in a collective base. The career of a student is a knowledge career, a moral career and a locational career' (1999:247). The collective base is constituted by the social order, whose principles are 'relayed' in schools; this process is institutionalized by the state. Bernstein views the discussion and the establishment of pedagogic identities as belonging to the requirement for today's pedagogic discourse to engage with contemporary changes. Pedagogic identities can be classified with regard to four positions: Retrospective (restricted, Old Conservative); Prospective (selected, Neo-Conservative); Decentered Market (differentiated, Neo-Liberal); and Decentered Therapeutic (integrated).

Retrospective Pedagogic Identities (RI) are constructed according to the 'grand narratives' of the past (national, religious, and cultural). Bernstein refers here to a process of recontextualization of these narratives, whereby the past is projected into the future. However, the discourse which provides resources for the construction of these identities does not interact directly with the current economic and social conditions. A characteristic feature of RIs is the 'tight control over discursive *inputs* to education, that is its contents, *not* over its *outputs*' (Bernstein 1999:248; italics original). In addition, RIs are constituted by stratified, hierarchically ordered, bounded, and sequenced discourses. These identities are produced in resistance to the changes which threaten most societies today.

The same is not the case with Prospective Pedagogic Identities (PI). These, too, recontextualize the past, but in a selective way, so as to make the selected features appropriate for dealing with the societal

changes, in particular for increasing the economic production. Here, a new collective base is formed, as nation, family, individual commitment, and enterprise are joined; here, too, careers are foregrounded rather than the collective base itself.

Decentered Pedagogic Identities are either market- or therapy-oriented. For Decentered Market Identities (DCM), the focus is on competition; hence the institution as an autonomous unit is required to make a difference in output. These identities are produced in a pedagogic practice that is contingent on the market; their products have an exchange value.

Autonomy is also necessary for Decentered Therapeutic Identities (DCT); here, the institution itself is expected to produce the features that characterize this identity: 'an integrated modality of knowing and a participating, co-operative modality of social relation' (Bernstein *ibid.*:249).

Since all pedagogic identities are constituted in power relations, a discussion of these relations allows us to better understand the field of literacy (the 'sites', as we have called them) and the ongoing debates on the inequality of discourse rights. The next section will present four in-site case studies that will illuminate these issues and the accompanying debates.

2. *Adult Literacy Sites*

2.1. The Adult Literacy Program, Catholic University (CUB, 1999)

This adult literacy program is organized by the Catholic University of Brasilia (CUB), Brasília, D.F., Brazil. The focus of the program is on the development of learners' capacities of *literacy* (reading, writing) and *numeracy* (arithmetic skills). The program's *Teachers' Manual* refers to teacher qualification according to the Dom Bosco Method of Education, which is based on the concept of *functional literacy*, a view of literacy that is linked with economic development (Street 1984).

The data selected for this analysis was collected by Vera L. C. Conceição (1999), as part of the research project *Intertextuality, Literacy, Identity*, which was funded by the Brazilian National Council for

Scientific and Technological Development (*Conselho Nacional de Pesquisa, CNPq*; see Magalhães 2000). In collaboration with two of the teachers in the program, Conceição observed one of their classes for three months. She also interviewed the teachers; in addition, she interviewed six of the learners and took field notes. For our analysis, we selected the teacher interviews; we also used Conceição's field notes. The teachers (named here K, a woman, and A, a man)² are students at Catholic University; their participation in the adult literacy program was made possible by a grant. The difference between our analysis and Conceição's is that whereas the latter focuses on aspects of literacy proper, our focus is on linguistic difference and power.

2.2. The First Community Adult Literacy Program (CAL-a, 1999)

Earlier research projects in adult literacy were carried out in the city of Paranoá (a satellite community of the Brazilian capital, Brasília, D.F.) from 1991 to 1996 (Magalhães 1995b). The program (supported by the Paranoá Center for Cultural Development, *Cedep*) was started in 1987 (Da Costa et al. 1997); during 1992 and 1993, as part of the program, we interviewed teachers and learners, respectively members of local associations, about the use of writing in the community.

The present paper focuses on interviews with two teachers, which we will name C and G; both C and G are politically active within *Cedep*. G, 36, is from Bom Jesus, Piauí, in the Northeast, while C, 28, is from Paranoá itself. In addition to these data, we will re-analyze data collected by Alexandre F. Costa in 1999, as part of the research project *Intertextuality, Literacy, Identity* (Magalhães 2000). Costa collaborated with local teachers, who had to write reports on their activities within the project to the educational authorities of Brasília. He interviewed two further teachers, a man and a woman (named here respectively A and P), who had not been interviewed previously; in addition, he interviewed one of the co-ordinators of the project (J). P had started teaching at the project, being motivated by the fact of her father having taken literacy classes in the program. As to the interview with A and J, this took place as part of a discussion of the program's teaching problems.

2.3. The Second Community Adult Literacy Program (CAL-b, 2002)

Here, we have selected for analysis data collected in another adult literacy program during 1999-2000 in Paranoá by Elenita G. Rodrigues (2002). Our interest in Rodrigues' data is mainly in issues of power as these come to the fore in an interview with a teacher (here called M), as well as during a round table discussion at the University of Brasília which took place with the participation of the program's co-ordinator (D).

At this round table, linguistic differences are embedded in power relations; these relations have to do with the structure of the event, inasmuch as it was organized by rank. This involved a division by groups of the presentations by university staff (the first part of the event) and of those presented by members of the community educational programs (the second part).

In her own presentation, the community literacy program co-ordinator, D, explored the opposition existing between the two groups with regard to attitudes to, and practices of literacy. This strategy was further highlighted significantly by the presentation of a play in non-standard Portuguese, prior to the second part of the round table, thus paving the way for the community participants' presentation by creating a social boundary effect (Rodrigues 2002:94-99).

As for the interview data, M (who is an experienced teacher in the Paranoá literacy program) presented a vivid account of how it all started. As said above, also here we have re-analyzed previously collected data.

2.4. The Workplace Adult Literacy Project (WAL, 2003)

The data analyzed here is part of our current research project (funded by the *CNPq*): *Discourse and Identity in Classroom, Workplace, and Community Contexts*. The data was collected in two institutions in Brasília: the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture, where the learners are employed in jobs such as janitors, watchmen, porters, and coffee shop attendants. The analysis is based on two interviews with learners (B, male, and C, female), who were asked the following

questions: 'Why are you taking literacy classes?', and 'What has changed in your life after you started taking classes?' In their answers, the interviewees present narratives about their past and present conditions, focusing on the issue of linguistic differences. In the workplace context, literacy is seen as embedded in power relations, and also as a way to improve one's work and become eligible for promotion.

3. Discourse Inequalities

3.1. Difference and autonomy

Table 1 shows the differences found in the data with regard to choice of language variety (Standard vs. Non-Standard Portuguese), with regard to distribution of linguistic knowledge, and with regard to the conditions in which the existence of unequal discourse rights is considered problematic. In all four analyzed cases, the field of literacy is considered an area where a legitimate struggle for power takes place; the struggle is about the status of the dominant ('standard') variety of Portuguese (SP).

In Catholic University's Adult Literacy Program (CUB 1999), teaching focuses predominantly on the rules of SP and thus contributes to reinforcing the division between the literate and the illiterate; the privileged view is that of a strong autonomous literacy (Street 1984, 1995). In the Brazilian educational context, cognitive development is seen as controlled and facilitated by societal power; as a result, many students in the literacy programs have a view of themselves as ignorant, stupid, incapable, and even 'blind' (Magalhães 1995b; Da Costa *et al.* 1997). Learners are aware of being discriminated against in their local community, they have a history of shame, caused by social domination (their employment is seen as 'slave work'); in addition, their learning experiences preclude their challenging the teachers in any way. As a result of this, the dominant, autonomous view of literacy is resistant to change; access to pedagogic discourse is entirely controlled by knowledge of the rules of SP (a control in the shape of a 'language device'; Bernstein 1996).

Table 1. Linguistic Differences

Cases	Linguistic Choice	Linguistic Knowledge	Conditions Where Unequal Discourse Rights Are Problematic
Adult Literacy Programme/ CUB (1999)	Emphasis on rules of Standard Portuguese (SP)	Blindness Metaphor Decontextualizes Words Commands Training	Discrimination 'Shame' 'Slave Work' Racism/Sexism
Community Adult Literacy Programme/ CAL-a (1999)	Literacy Games Non-Standard Portuguese (NP)	Coordinator Control	Coordinator's Observations
Community Adult Literacy Programme/ CAL-b (2002)	1) Round Table University Action in Local Communities (SP) 2) Play (NP)	University Authorities' Control of Presentations	Rank Division 'Shame'
Workplace Adult Literacy Programme/ WAL (2003)	Learner Claims 'Improvement' in SP	Acquiring Linguistic Knowledge Related to the Workplace Bureaucratic Control	Need to Figure Out What Is Meant 'Difficulty' 'Shame'

In the First Community Adult Literacy Program (CAL-a 1999), there is much less evidence of such an autonomous view of literacy. In fact, in the data examined here, Non-Standard Portuguese (NP) is positively valued in the literacy games played by the students (as mentioned in one of the teacher interviews). While this does not mean that there is no concern about teaching and learning the rules of SP, still, in this case the pedagogic discourse is influenced by the political discourse of the powerful Workers' Party (*Partido Trabalhista, PT*) and its strong commitment to the issue of 'alphabetization' and literacy; as a result, control shifts from the teacher to the co-ordinator (Fairclough 1999).

This recontextualization of the pedagogic discourse creates a space for opposition to the rules governing linguistic distribution, 'regulat[ing] the relationships between power, social groups, forms of consciousness and practice' (Bernstein 1996:42).

As an example, consider the way one of the teachers challenges the coordinator's power to control his way of teaching (from an interview with teacher A; Da Costa 1999):

(1)

Researcher: Who is complaining, A?

Teacher: A few co-ordinators... for example J... and also G ... I think that... people are not alike... they're alike in some points... but different in several points...

Researcher: What do they complain about really?

Teacher: They complain that I'm not at ease in class... that my voice is far from acceptable... they say that the students can hardly... hear what I'm saying... they say that I speak in a very low voice.

Researcher: And don't you agree... do you think that this isn't really a problem?

Teacher: No, I think it's a problem... but ... it's a problem all right... but not like they make it appear... but I don't agree with them entirely... what I think must be changed, OK... what must be changed, OK... I try the best I can... now... the way I am... I think I mustn't stop being myself just because the others want me to... (Da Costa 1999:116-117)

What the co-ordinators view as a problem with this teacher is that he does not conform to the features that they expect to be part of being a teacher, such as speaking loudly in order to impart authority. A can consider three alternatives: he can adjust, and adopt the expected teacher style; he can ignore the co-ordinators' criticisms; or he can challenge them – which is what he decides to do. He admits that talking in a low voice in class is a problem, since, as the co-ordinators say, 'the students can hardly hear' what he is saying. But while he is prepared to adapt to a certain extent to what is demanded, he is not ready to surrender entirely to the impositions of the pedagogic

discourse. In the negative clause *eu não devo deixar de ser eu pra fazer a vontade dos outros* 'I mustn't stop being myself just because the others want me to', the modal verb *não devo* 'I mustn't' indicates the teacher's opposition to a uniform pedagogic identity. Here, the teacher's tone of voice, along with the verbal expression of a personal identity, represents a particular ethos, namely, the ethos associated with a teacher identity.

In the Round Table event (Second Community Adult Literacy Program, CAL-b 2002), power is exercised by the university authorities who establish unequal rights for the participants. First, the authorities and their guests (the experts) present figures documenting the university projects in Brasília's satellite towns. Here, the rhetoric of solidarity conceals the different ways in which the experts and the local community representatives are perceived. The use of a video camera and the presence of guests add to the distinctive treatment given to the authorities and their speeches. When it is the local community representatives' turn to present, the authorities are gone. This is noted by one of the community representatives as a lack of interest in the local communities. This unequal treatment is further stressed when the members of the local communities are represented as speakers of NP in the play which precedes their part in the event. This legitimizes the authorities' delegate power to represent the local community participants as NP speakers, dispossessed of the 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 1991) that is incorporated in the standard language.

In the Workplace Adult Literacy Program (WAL 2003), learners associate improvement in writing SP with acquiring the linguistic knowledge that is specific of their workplace, such as talking to the boss, answering the telephone, and communicating in their day-to-day interaction. As B, a porter at the Ministry of Education, notes, 'many times someone said something, and I had to figure out what it meant; today...there are many things which... I already know what mean'. Such a belief in the power residing in the knowledge of how to use SP is one of the ways in which linguistic differences construct unequal identities for speakers of SP and NP.

The next section will discuss the way the four cases handle linguistic difference.

3.2. Discussion of the four cases studied

3.2.1. Choice of Varieties of Portuguese

The four cases shown in Table 1 differ as to their choice of varieties of Portuguese. At the Catholic University Adult Literacy Programme (CUB 1999), there is a strong emphasis on the teaching of SP rules. One of the teachers (here called K) stated her view of language as a static, unchangeable entity in the following words:

We receive the [Portuguese] language from others who have already used it in speaking and writing, so we cannot change it according to our own will. It has rules which we have to respect if we want to write and speak well.

Such a representation of the legacy of language is ideological to the extent that it presents a social process in which the power of institutions like academies, schools, and the media legitimizes SP as a unitary, homogeneous language.

In the First Community Adult Literacy Program (CAL-a 1999), teacher P reports on the literacy games played in the program; she also presents her view of literacy teaching and learning as play in the following words: '*toda vez que eu vou dar aula... eu tento fazer essa aula uma brincadeira*' 'every time I'm going to teach... I try to turn the class into play' (Costa 1999, Appendix II). In this kind of teaching, learners take part without any teacher control on the way they speak. Thus, NP is used quite freely.

In the Round Table event of the Second Community Adult Literacy Program (CAL-b 2002), linguistic difference is made explicit through the way the presentations are organized in accordance with the division by rank: the university authorities and experts speak SP, while the community representatives are expected to speak NP. The same difference is suggested in the play, where the community representatives use NP.

In the Workplace Adult Literacy Program (WAL 2003), learners associate literacy with SP, as shown in the following example, (2),

where a learner, here called B, expresses his views on the usefulness of literacy education.

(2)

Researcher: What has changed in your life after you started taking classes?

Learner B: I think my relationship with colleagues. It's not that before, I had relationship problems, but many times because you don't have the right expressions, because you don't know how to express yourself correctly, many times you restrict, so to speak, your relationship with people, because you don't know how to address this person, you know, you address, but you don't use, you don't say the correct words. (Magalhães 2003)

This learner's feeling of being unable to address people properly, and of being at a disadvantage in his relationship with them is attributed to the fact that he speaks NP; he is unable to 'express [him]self correctly', that is in SP, not in NP, which he considers to be 'incorrect' Portuguese. For this learner, literacy has the power of making a person not only accepted socially, but even respected. This point is in accordance with an earlier analysis, in which we examine an interview with R, a learner in one of the initial Community Literacy Programs in Paranoá (re-analyzed in CAL-a 1999). R finds that those who have not had access to literacy suffer from what he calls 'speech problems' (Magalhães 1995b:270).

3.2.2. The distribution of linguistic knowledge

In all the four cases investigated, linguistic knowledge is unequally distributed (see Table 1). However, the cases differ as to the degree of inequality and also as to who can, and who cannot, control this distribution. The Catholic University Literacy Program (CUB 1999) is the most rigid of all: it follows an autonomous view of literacy, with a sharp division between those who have the power to distribute linguistic knowledge (the authorities, the teachers) and those who merely are at the receiving end (the learners). Accordingly, there is an

emphasis on training and a concern about showing quick results. A few illustrative examples follow.

Teacher training was carried out in a five-day course, which is obviously not sufficient to qualify teachers. Moreover, as one of the teachers interviewed mentioned, his training time was reduced to a mere three days because of the urgent need to start the literacy classes as soon as possible. In addition, as to the teaching itself, this is based on a decontextualized vocabulary, as observations made in one class suggest. Take, for example, words like *sinhá* ('Missuz', a word typical of farm life in the past)³ or *tatu* (an animal only found in the country's rural areas). These terms are not part of the learners' personal or local context; yet they were freely used in teaching reading and writing. Likewise, new vocabulary was taught using visual aids (such as drawings), but the words were always presented in isolation from any proper context. When in one of the classes, there arose a lively discussion about linguistic discrimination (something which could have been used to stimulate reading and writing in relation to community problems), the follow-up work was an exercise in which the learners were asked to produce a short text about the *tatu*, such as the following:

The *tatu* is an animal. The *tatu* doesn't live in a fixed place. The *tatu* doesn't live in a cave. The *tatu* lives in a hole. The *tatu* has a good ear.

In this totally meaningless exercise, the focus was on rote learning of the syllables *ta* and *tu*, not on any contextually interesting and relevant vocabulary training. Another power-related aspect of this kind of teaching is the preference for examples containing *commands*; here, the teachers' explicit control of the classroom interaction becomes manifest. In one of the classes, the teacher wrote commands on the board, alongside with the names of the learners, who then were asked to read the commands and enact them (Conceição 1999:134).

Against this background, it is small wonder that the learners' self-esteem turns out to be low. This becomes particularly clear when we consider the learners' preference for the metaphor of 'blindness' in the context of their recognition of illiteracy as a shortcoming, and their

struggle to overcome it – a common-sense way of presenting their personal feelings about being illiterate (Magalhães 1995b:267-269). Consider the following comment, made in class by a 62-year old immigrant (here called H) from the Northeast: 'All teachers were sent by God to give light to those who are blind' (Conceição *ibid.*:133). In the context of the literacy classroom, this metaphor constructs a learner self-identity in which the blame for being in a socially disadvantageous position is placed on the learners themselves. Significantly, learners like H consider the teachers as bearers of God's light who, consequently, have the power to enlighten others. Thus, the blindness metaphor is ideological in the sense that it naturalizes illiteracy as an unavoidable natural phenomenon. It also justifies teacher authority, and views it as unquestionable, being part of a supernatural order.

In the other cases studied, linguistic knowledge is distributed differently. Thus, in the Workplace Literacy Program (WAL 2003), literacy is promoted and encouraged as part of the learners' work (in this case, in the Ministries of Education and of Agriculture); consequently, the monopolic distribution of linguistic knowledge is legitimized in a bureaucratic context. In the Round Table event (CAL-b 2002), it is the university authorities and invited experts who claim the power to classify and distribute linguistic knowledge, for example by explicitly establishing, respectively reinforcing, the division between speakers of SP and speakers of NP (but note that even so, one representative of the local associations did question this (mis)use of power by the authorities and its legitimacy). Similarly, as we have noted in the context of the Paranoá Adult Literacy Programs (see CAL-a 1999), while the distribution of linguistic knowledge officially is part of the co-ordinator's task, teacher A does claim the right to speak in his own way; hence the co-ordinator's authority is far from being seen as unquestionable.

3.2.3. Conditions in which unequal discourse rights are problematic

Comparing the four cases studied (see Table 1), it becomes clear that the conditions prevailing in each of them are different. The inequalities

in discourse rights are most marked in the Catholic University Literacy Program (CUB 1999), where learners and teachers share a strongly autonomous view of literacy; here, illiteracy is linked to 'shame', ignorance, discrimination, lack of independence, 'slave work', racism, sexism, and so on, as we have seen above (cf. Conceição 1999:134-135). Consider again the 62-year old H, who is unemployed and makes a living by doing *bicos* (informal, unskilled, unspecified jobs). This learner remembers the time when he was unable to sign his name and had to use his *dedão* (finger print with paint) as his signature. In another class, where the topic was civil rights, the teacher (here called K) introduced the syllable *za* to the learners, using the lexical item *zarolho* ('cross-eyed'); K also mentioned the term 'disabled' in this connection with a view towards getting the learners to discuss the topic among each others. When one of the women in the class, S, a cleaner, reported that her *patroá*⁴ (employer) exploited her, the other students suggested that she should fight for her rights; such an attitude is linked to literacy as a condition for what is called 'building citizenship' in the context of this Community Adult Literacy Program (CAL-a 1999). (On social change, see further below).

In yet another class, the learners played a literacy game in which they had to decode letters written on their cards. At a certain moment, one of the learners (T, a woman) had managed to decode the letter U, calling it 'u', 'like in *uveia*' (the NP pronunciation of the word for 'sheep'). She was corrected by one of her co-students (V, a man), who told her (in NP) that the word was *oveia*, not *uveia* ('É *oveia minina*' 'It's sheep, girl', with the dialect form *minina* of the word 'girl', rather than the SP form *menina*). To this, S (another woman in the class) added that it was 'u', 'like in *uruvaio*' (a regional dialect form of the word for 'dew', unfamiliar to most of the participants). When the teacher asked her to explain what she meant, the class realized that the word she was referring to was called *orvalho* ('dew', in SP). In another instance, the letter 'z' was introduced by means of the lexical item *zumbi*. Learner H (the 62-year old man) explained that a *zumbi* was something which keeps one awake at night. A (another male student) then reminded the class of the historical fact that the original Zumbi had been a great Afro-Brazilian slave who had died defending his people. There followed a discussion about the Brazilian commemorative event called

the 'Day of Afro-Brazilian Consciousness'. Here, one learner mentioned the name of the Princess Isabel in connection with the passing of the laws that abolished the institution of slavery in Brazil in the second half of the 19th Century.⁵ This brought the learners to the topic of discrimination: S argued that there discrimination was being practiced 'not only against Afro-Brazilians, but also against other groups such as illiterate persons and women'. According to her husband, she said, women didn't need identity cards because their identification was provided by their husbands; her own husband objected to her taking literacy classes (Conceição 1999:135). The discussion showed that both learners and teachers were unhappy about such inequalities in their social context.

At the Round Table event (CAL-b 2002), the way the presentations were organized further reveals the existence of power relations in the field of literacy. The university authorities and experts made their speeches first; the dramatic performance was second; the representatives of the local literacy programs were scheduled to speak last. The problem with this kind of organization is that it reinforces the socio-cultural divisions between the literate and the illiterate; the ethos it represents is uniquely associated with this division into social classes.

The Workplace Literacy Program (WAL 2002) participants view illiteracy as a matter of speaking ungrammatical Portuguese (Magalhães 1995b), as becomes clear in the case of C, a woman of 48 and a coffee shop attendant by profession. In the interview in which she commented on what had changed in her work situation after she started taking classes, the lexical item 'shame' and the clause 'We speak very incorrectly' occurred three times. Clearly, S feels that there is a division between those who belong to the literate culture and those, like herself, who have to learn 'how to talk to people' in order to improve their work situation. Another learner whom we selected for analysis in this paper, A, 52, a porter, similarly referred to the (semantic/pragmatic) 'difficulties' he was having in the past, when trying to 'figure out' the meaning of what people said to him.

As regards the potential of the literacy programs for engaging the learners' social consciousness, especially the First Community Adult Literacy Program (CAL-a 1999), being more in keeping with an ideological view of literacy (Street 1995), shows a tendency to change

the ways literacy is taught and promoted. While the participants in this program have been exposed to the official pedagogic discourse (the program's literacy classes are offered in association with the Faculty of Education of the University of Brasília), they also have been familiarized with the work of the progressive Brazilian educator, the late Paulo Freire (1970, 1985); in addition, they have been influenced by the political stance of the Workers' Party (*PT*, see above) and its educational policies. In an attempt to develop 'an alternative account' which to a certain extent challenges the commonly accepted notions about literacy, power is exercised in the program by the co-ordinators, in association with the leaders of *Cedep*, the Paranoá community association which is in charge of the literacy classes.

3.2.4. Strategies in dealing with linguistic differences

Learners and teachers adopt different strategies to deal with linguistic differences in the four cases studied. (See Table 2)

Table 2. Strategies in Dealing with Linguistic Differences

Adult Literacy Programme - CUB (1999)	Community Adult Literacy Programme - CAL-a (1999)	Community Adult Literacy Programme - CAL-b (2002)	Workplace Adult Literacy Project WAL (2003)
Discussion Is Hindered by Emphasis on Decontextualized Language Samples Preference for Autonomous Model of Literacy Syllable Formation, Decontextualized Vocabulary	Discussion Political Participation	Opposition Transgression 'Collective Text Production', Preference for Ideological Model of Literacy	Taking In-service Courses Women: Professional Education Helping their Children Men: Acquire New Knowledge

The Catholic University's Adult Literacy Program (CUB 1999), with its strongly autonomous view of literacy (on which the Dom Bosco Method is based), hinders the learners' development towards a fully conscious view and use of literacy skills. The topics for class discussion are assigned by the teacher; some of the proposed themes could indeed lead the learners to new ways of perceiving themselves and their present lives (for instance in relation to their past existence in the rural areas of Northeast Brazil), however, the emphasis on mechanized language drills such as syllable formation (cf. the example of *za*, in Section 3.2.3), and on decontextualized lexical items (like *sinhá* and *tatu* in Section 3.2.2), hampers the development of the learners' reflexive capacities. In other words, the learners' awareness of linguistic difference is not exploited to help them develop a strategic instrumentality.

The development of such an instrumentality has clearly been one of the aims of the Workplace Literacy Program (WAL 2002). Here, both teachers and learners view the acquisition of literacy as a strategy for dealing both with linguistic difference as well as with the demands of the workplace. The two learners who were selected for analysis in this study both feel that acquiring literacy and knowledge of SP has expanded their communication resources. For them, taking an on-the-job course is a strategy to secure a future promotion. One of the two learners, B (cf. example (2), above) emphasizes the effect of the acquisition of literacy on his job performance: for example, he is better now at answering the telephone and writing messages, and at performing the other rituals which are part of the literate culture, such as knocking on his boss's door before entering, saying 'Excuse me' before starting to talk, and in general, speaking in such a way that people will understand him. Learner C also mentions that her performance has changed; she has noted how her improved self-esteem has made her more confident when talking to people.

In this connection, a brief comment is in order on the respective strategies adopted by women and men in dealing with linguistic difference. Women take literacy classes and develop their knowledge of SP as a way of improving their professional qualifications and securing for themselves the same rights in the workplace that the men have. Given the traditional gender division in Brazilian society, this

point is significant in that it indicates a change of identity on the part of the women. This change continues to coexist alongside the women's traditional concern for taking care of their children (Magalhães 2005). The coexistence of these conflicting identities is part of the social, cultural, and economic changes that have occurred in Brazilian society during the last few decades. In contrast, a similar conflict does not exist in the case of the male learners, whose strategy is uniquely focused on acquiring new knowledge and skills so as to be able to advance in their jobs (see further Section 4, below).

The strategy adopted in the First Community Adult Literacy Program (CAL-a 1999) and in the Round Table event (CAL-b 2002) for dealing with linguistic difference is to combine the acquisition of literacy with political activity. Such a strategy has proven effective in making the participants conscious of themselves and visible in society, and in this way supporting them in their struggles with the authorities (Magalhães 1995b). The emphasis here is on the ideological view of literacy, in particular as regards 'building citizenship', the ideological stance adopted by the teachers which also stresses the importance of discussing the process of acquiring literacy with the learners themselves. As was noted earlier, such a combination of literacy training with political activism often results in violations of the accepted rules for learner behavior and in resistance to the control exerted by the co-ordinators; thus, teacher A, when criticized by some of the co-ordinators, defended his right to speak in his own way (cf. Section 3.2.2). In the same vein, another teacher (called here P) questioned the technique of cutting-and-pasting in teaching adults; and one of the co-ordinators (called here J) complained about her insufficient political knowledge (Costa 1999). Here, we see how raising this kind of questions and opposing the current educational and other policies are a natural ingredient of this philosophy and practice of teaching literacy.

Similarly, two other teachers (called C and G) underscore the importance of their political engagement with the Center for the Cultural Development of Paranoá (*Cedep*), this engagement being a necessary condition for their teaching in the Community Adult Literacy Programs. G notes that teacher education should address issues that stimulate teachers to identify with those who have not had

access to formal schooling. Further, teachers should become involved with the local communities in which they operate (Magalhães 1996a, 1996b). This point is related to Heath's admonition that teacher education should find 'ways to make accessible to teachers an understanding of the differences in language and culture their students bring to their classrooms' (Heath 1983:265).

Another literacy event, called 'Collective Text Production' is centered around the production of a written text as a joint effort to which all of the learners in a class contribute. Such an activity fits in well with the political engagement stressed above, and is fairly typical for *Cedep's* view of literacy, a view we will call *participatory literacy*. Coordinator D, in her speech at the Round Table event referred to above (Section 2.3), confirms this view when she addresses the authorities present with the words: 'We don't want just information, figures, we want from our partners [the university] an interest which equals our own' (Rodrigues 2002:99). This kind of political engagement and explicit ideological positioning make the Second Community Adult Literacy Program (CAL-b 2002) the one that is most involved with, and relevant to, the local community's literacy needs.

4. Conclusion: Discourse inequalities and identities

One result of our analysis is that the effective negotiation of equal discourse rights depends on teachers and learners engaging themselves actively in discursive literacy practices with a view to end the present conditions of inequality in literacy sites and elsewhere. Such conditions, and the accompanying participation patterns and identity positions, are strongly dependent on the degree to which teachers and learners are familiar with the use of the varieties of Portuguese, in particular of the standard variety, SP.

In this connection, we noted how the discursive literacy practices in the four cases studied differ with regard to linguistic choice, to the distribution of linguistic knowledge, to the conditions in which unequal discourse rights are considered problematic, and to the strategies adopted to deal with linguistic difference. These heterogeneous practices shape heterogeneous identities.

Given the current (2005) Brazilian government's concern with (il)literacy and (un)employment, it makes sense to ask how such government policies affect people's identities. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in an interview given in 2003 that was widely covered by the media, made the following statement about the government's adult literacy policy: 'We have to adopt this policy as if it were a massive vaccination campaign, in which the virus that we want to kill is illiteracy'.⁶ The title of the news report, 'Lula's Program Promises to Eradicate Illiteracy in 2006', is clad in the kind of rhetoric that traditionally employs metaphors picturing illiteracy as a disease, a 'virus', which must be 'killed' and 'eradicated'; in another metaphor, support for literacy is considered an 'article of faith' (cf. also Barton 1994).

Not by chance, the news report referred to above presents a great number of figures; cf.: 'The Literate Brazil Program began almost nine months ago, and, in the government's account, it has already taught literacy to over one million people in 1,768 towns' (*ibid.*, p. 1; my translation, IM). One million more people were to be taught by the end of 2003, and until the end of the current program (2006), 20 million more. Such a focus on figures is not new in the case of governmental declarations and speeches on literacy campaigns in Brazil; examples are the *Mobral* program ('Brazilian Literacy Movement', *Movimento Brasileiro de Letramento*), promoted by the military dictatorship in the 1970s, or the 'Solidarity Literacy Program' that was launched during the former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso's tenure in the 1990s.

Admittedly, President Lula and his State Secretaries, in particular the Education Secretary (who, at the time of the interview, was the well-known *PT* politician Cristovam Buarque), address both the population and the market, that is, institutions like banks, the Stock Exchange, and the International Monetary Fund. This is also why in his interview, President Lula puts forward two arguments: first, the need to end illiteracy; and second, the government's effort to show that the present campaign is dedicated to the production of a competitive output.

In the present context, this implies that the current literacy campaign is set in a field that is contingent on the market; using

Bernstein's terminology, introduced above, at the end of Section 1, one could say that the identity produced in this way is that of the Decentered Market (DCM). The same identity is produced in the Workplace Adult Literacy Program (WAL 2003), where learners clearly experience linguistic difference in terms of market values and attribute an exchange value to literacy in terms of qualification for job promotions.⁷

In the Catholic University Adult Literacy Program (CUB 1999), the Retrospective Pedagogic Identity (RI) is still strong, as demonstrated by the fact that both learners and teachers are engaged in narratives covering their (both personal and supposedly common) cultural past. Discursive inputs are tightly controlled (an extremely conservative pedagogic method); also, the identities promoted in this literacy site do not exhibit any explicit relation with the actual economic and social conditions.

As regards the Community Adult Literacy Programs (CAL-a 1999 and CAL-b 2002), these present the most well-defined kind of identity viz., the Prospective Pedagogic one (PI); here, teachers and community leaders recontextualize the community values in order to deal with cultural change.

Future work in this field should research the ways in which linguistic difference in literacy sites positions, and is positioned with regard to, pedagogic identities.

University of Brasília
Brasília, D.F.
Brazil

Notes

1. This paper was presented in the colloquium 'Negotiating Communication Rights' at Sociolinguistics Symposium 15, held at the University of Newcastle, UK, on April 1-4, 2004. The colloquium was organized by Simon Gieve, from the University of Leicester, School of Education, UK.
Thanks to Rachael Anneliese Radhay for reading and revising the original version.

2. All names are pseudonyms.
3. According to one learner, H., *sinhá* was the form addressed to a farmer's wife, meaning that she was superior to the other women living on the farm. The diminutive form *sinhazinha* was addressed to the *sinhá's* daughter (Conceição, 1999: 135).
4. Term used to refer to a woman who hires another woman to do house chores.
5. The Princess Isabel is associated with the end of Afro-Brazilian slavery, having signed the law which put an end to it.
6. *UOL Notícias* (UOL News), September 8th, 2003, p. 2. <http://noticias.uol.com.br>
7. The Decentered Therapeutic Identity in Bernstein's classification (DCT) is not considered here.

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