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Génesis y evolución socio-histórica de la macro categoría cultura escrita

Genesis and socio-historical evolution of the written culture macro category

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a genesis and evolution socio-historical outline of the written culture from which pedagogical proposals to teach and learn to write have emerged over time. It is a documentary - analytical investigation, by which it is approached how theories based on written culture and pedagogy about writing have evolved from a holistic and transdisciplinary vision, with a view to systematize information on this topic to know the evolution of theories regarding writing models and their impact on teaching practice. Therefore, a description of the writing systems in their socio-historical contexts, their uses and pedagogical practices are exposed in order to contribute to a reflection / action that leads us to the change of the traditional teaching-learning model of the written language by a model focused on the discursive pedagogy of writing.

Keywords: Written language; writing systems; educational research; reading research. (Words taken from UNESCO Thesaurus).

INTRODUCCIÓN

First, the need to establish “what written culture implies” emerges in the general framework of theories that address the written language. But before, it is convenient to clarify that this essay is part of an investigation related to the evaluation of written competence, taking into account descriptive records of the students’ written productions at Middle Education in Falcón State, Venezuela (2018-2019).

Therefore, this work has as a purpose to document the forms, uses, and practices of written culture included within the written language. For what? This approach will contribute to the identification and construction of conceptual semantic networks for establishing relationships between categories and subcategories and, also, for the definition and classification of these in: dimensions, attributes, variables and patterns. In this way, these branches will guide the process for the selection of the central category, for its saturation and, finally, its theorization. In summary, this procedure will provide theoretical data that will be valid for the comparison of the results obtained from the phenomenon under study through the theoretical triangulation. In this way; all the procedure corresponds to the Qualitative Paradigm under the Grounded Theory modality.

From this perspective, it is pertinent to carry out a hermeneutic understanding exercise around the theoretical approaches of some researchers on the role of written culture and its link with the cognitive, linguistic, pragmatic and discursive processes of the human being. Such processes must be immersed in the written language teaching.

From this approach, the written culture macro-category is a conceptualization that has been used in other studies by outstanding international and national researchers such as: Jack Goody, (1963,1968, 1987, 1996); R. Harris (1986); David Olson (1977,1980,1990,1994,1998); E. Havelock (1963,1976,1982,1991); Walter Ong (1976,1982); Roger Chartier (1999); Josefina Peña (2008); Glenys Pérez (2008); Pilar Figueroa, (2011); Rudy Mostacero (2017, 2012) and Stella, Serrano (2003), among others.

In this sense and for the purpose of this article, the notion of written culture (literacy) has emerged from the work of the cognitive psychologist Olson, (1998) who defines it as:

[...] It is the competition to exploit a certain set of cultural resources. It is the evolution of these resources, in conjunction with the knowledge and ability to exploit them for specific purposes. Western written culture is not just learning the alphabet, it is learning to use the resources of writing for a culturally defined set of tasks and procedures. (Pp. 64-65)

Consequently, this analysis will allow us to build a holistic, comprehensive and transdisciplinary vision through a socio-historical reflection of written culture from its origins to its current evolution and how it has influenced the pedagogical models of writing in order to check its scope. In this regard, it is established that these dissertations will be structured by periods. Thus, under space limitations within this format, this will imply a continuum in the theme of a series of essays with which this work is organized.

Secondly, this retrospection will include various socio-historical epochs, which span from Prehistory with the invention of writing. Next, the periods that comprise history from Antiquity or also called Classical Age will be addressed. Then the Middle Ages will be reviewed. Later, the Modern Age until the Contemporary Age. It should be noted that in each period the predominant conceptions of written language will be examined, as well as the uses that are generated from it in pedagogical practice and the type of competence that derives from their learning.

For this purpose, a documentary and comparative approach will be applied, using epistemological categories of: psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, semantics and discourse analysis. In summary, a methodology will be used to build categories from the perspective of Grounded Theory. For this purpose, the approach of an interdisciplinary linguistics will be used to analyze the different civilizations that along the socio-historical transit contributed their knowledge, practices and procedures, and also, gave rise to writing through the creation of the alphabet.

And because this "communication technology" as McLuhan called it in 1962 generated a practice of reading and writing for a very restricted social group; even, within the same

nobility. But then its democratization was promoted by the participation of some key actors through other socio-historical events.

The Invention of Writing in the Prehistoric Era. Transition between Hominid and Homo sapiens

Paleolithic man developed a set of skills and techniques forming a data or a record to adapt and dominate the world, then all this has passed down to successive generations through imitation. This knowledge contributed to the revolution that, later, the Neolithic man carried out when developing the technique for agriculture.

Thereupon, the Paleolithic man made the most of everything, convinced that the group's idea was prevalent to preserve life through manufactured products and utensils for hunting, fishing, and food gathering, likewise, he also developed another rock art faculty, thus giving indications of the cognitive processes related to symbolization or representation that were brewing in their minds. In this same sense, Strauss, (1966) provided a description that showed us the implication of these facts:

Transforming a herb into a cultivated plant, a wild beast into a domestic animal, producing in both cases useful nutritional or technological properties that were originally absent [...] Transforming toxic roots or seeds into food or using its poison for hunting, war or the rituals. (Quoted by Olson, 1998; p.44).

From this point of view, Neolithic man, who had achieved the acquisition of knowledge about agriculture, began to have a sense of permanence in his space. Then he refined his social organization, since the hordes became clans, so it was required that criteria could be established for the selection of clan chiefs according to the type of knowledge or physical strength they possessed. In this regard, Ponce (1981) stated:

In the initial days of the early community, anyone could be, momentarily, a judge or a chief; now the social structure was beginning to get complicated. For certain functions, some knowledge was required so, the owners began to consider it as a source of [...] dominance. Each organizer educated their relatives to carry out their duties [...] and in that way, the Leading functions became the heritage of a small group that jealously defended its secrets. (p.37)

Parallel to this reality, the instruments for the domestication of animals were created. In the opinion of the aforementioned author, the changes occurred when the production techniques were modified, which brought a higher production yield, since the division of labor had already occurred.

Thence, there was the division of labor between farmers and shepherds as a transcendental fact of prehistory. With the passing of time, the direction of the work became separated from the work itself; that is, the mental forces from the physical strength. Therefore, social groups are stratified according to their knowledge and assets. Emerging within the estates, the dominated and the dominator. Within this process, contempt is generated towards manual work performed by the dominated. This entire situation leads to the replacement of the matriarchal society by a patriarchal society. Then that patriarchal tribal society developed a mythical-religious apparatus, thus the symbolic element appeared structured at the cognitive level. In this way, the social strata such as the magicians and the priests hold power.

In conclusion, this period called prehistory "is the first stage in the history of man, which has its beginning in the appearance of the first man until the invention of writing" León y Pinzón, (1997, p.1). In this regard, research reports that when the invention of writing originated, a new stage occurs. Let us see in what conditions this writing system occurred:

An extremely important graphical form from which all writing systems in the West may have developed, is the token system developed in Mesopotamia for accounting purposes [...] the system, invented by the ancient Sumerians, around the time when hunters and gatherers' societies were giving rise to an agricultural way of life which consisted of a set of clay tiles with distinctive shapes, used to register sheep, cows and other animals as well as merchandise [...] the chips began to be pierced, in such a way that they could be inserted together "(Olson, 1998; p. 96).

From Olson's approach it was inferred that writing was born as such, when it ceased to be an emblem and became a generative combination system of emblems, as well as

when they have acquired syntax such as language. "It is the syntax which makes a graphic system "generative" for it permits the combination and recombination of symbols to express a broad range of meanings" (Ob.cit; p.97). Therefore, from the analysis it is deduced that when the linguistic signs acquired syntax, they became writing systems.

Another version of the writing invention was provided by the works of Havelock (1982) and Gelb (1963). For these researchers, the script was invented from the syllabary of a Semitic language, possibly the Phoenician, who lived in the north of the Fertile Crescent, arable land that connected the civilizations of Babylon and Egypt. (Quoted by Olson, 1998; p.107).

To finish with the origin of writing, it is important to highlight that there was a transition between consonant writing and alphabetic writing. This occurred when Semitic writing was adapted to a non-Semitic language such as Greek and the alphabet was then produced. Let us now turn to examine the peoples of antiquity in the next section.

The Written Culture in the Peoples of Antiquity

In that socio-historical period that included Antiquity or the also called Classical Age, the agricultural towns had their settlements, among which the Egyptian civilization stood out, whose geographical space was located in north-east Africa, nestled on the banks of the Nile River. Egyptians were the result of a process of miscegenation with the peoples who were around them, such as: the Semites, the Libyans and the Nubians. In relation to the written culture, the Egyptians developed intellectual capacities among them considering writing as a means of communication through hieroglyphs. It must also be said that in this type of writing the words are represented with symbols or figures. Hence, in relation to this view:

They constitute a complex structure, with a very rich vocabulary and complicated grammar. Some of these hieroglyphs are ideograms. Other hieroglyphs and phonograms represent one to three consonants. For current operations, the scribes used simplified hieratic and demotic script for more relevant matters. (Larousse, 2007; p.28).

Consequently, their literary works were evidence of the written language use, among which we highlight: the Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys, the Litany to the Sun, the Books of the two Ways, and the Book of the Dead and the Satire of the Trades. The latter work refers to the Egyptian craftsmen's hard life and the contempt that the lawyers felt towards them.

It is worth mentioning that the scribes also fulfilled the function of tax collectors. Among them, there were scribes judges or princes of the newly conquered countries. These ones only thought about getting rich in the shortest possible time. In this regard Goody, (1968, p.48) points out the following: "in Egypt and Mesopotamia as in China, a literate elite of religious, administrative and commercial experts emerged, who formed a centralized ruling bureaucracy." These groups held power within that socio-historical context, and the written language had a functional meaning, since it was used for the exercise of that power.

The teaching model was based on the repetition and acquisition of the written code for bureaucratic use. In this framework of ideas, it is relevant to point out "that writing encouraged the growth of magical-religious activity. The priest was the educated man, the literate and the intellectual who controlled natural as well as supernatural communication. In other words, he was privileged by the ability to handle writing (Goody, 1968, p.26).

On the other hand, the Mesopotamian civilization was developing some intellectual powers in the arid scenario, such as: agriculture, commerce, medicine, astronomy, literature and music, specifically, along the Euphrates River and Tigris, the mountainous region of Armenia that extends to the north of the swampy region where those rivers pour their waters into the Persian Gulf. That knowledge was based on the mastery of writing systems.

It should be noted that within this territory the Chaldean, Sumerian and Assyrian peoples had their settlements, which were formed as a result of crossbreeding. In the case of the Chaldeans they bequeathed the Hammurabi Code as a contribution to written culture,

which was created by the VI king of the same name, who dictated the laws that governed the nobility, the peasants, free artisans and slaves. In this way, it was evident that the written language was not only used for accounting purpose but also to control citizens, that is, writing was used to impose rules and punishments, hence, its functional use.

In this regard, the peoples of Mesopotamia and those of Chaldea dominated cuneiform writing so, their knowledge of astronomy and astrology were reflected on it. This cuneiform script was used by the Assyrians, the Persians, and the Medes. Its writing system consisted in engraving on clay tablets and cylinders. This writing was done from left to right, and consisted of wedge-shaped signs that represented words and syllables. Cuneiform writing spread over a wide region and served to write different languages, which had no linguistic kinship with each other. (See Ferreiro, 1998; p.221).

In Babylon lexicography, grammar, mathematics, and jurisprudence were developed. In relation to the ancient Phoenician civilization region of the Eastern Mediterranean, they were located on a narrow strip of land located in the western coast of Syria and Lebanon. It had an oligarchy system of government in which each city was independent. They were a people of Semitic origin and founded predominantly maritime and commercial cities. They excelled as great sailors of the Mediterranean between 1500 and 500 BC. It was an educated town. The Phoenician language was Semitic and they created their own alphabet between 2000 and 1500 BC.

Among the characteristics of the Phoenician alphabet, it had initials for non-existent sounds in Greek, as well as pharyngeal sounds and glottal obstruction. There, where the Phoenicians heard an initial consonant, the Greeks heard a vowel. The Greek alphabet was derived from the Phoenician alphabet.

In this regard, Brookfield in his research described the process of writing acquisition in agricultural civilizations such as the Egyptians, the Mesopotamians, the Phoenicians and the Hebrew peoples, emphasizing how the Greeks adopted the Semitic Phoenician alphabet. In this sense, he concluded:

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The ancient peoples of Mesopotamia, including the Sumerians and the Babylonians were the earliest civilizations that used these characters [...] Later, hieroglyphs appear in Egypt, which were born out of the need to expand, but at the same time to simplify the sign [...] Phoenicians made a selection of twenty phonetic characters, which allowed to form all the words; thus the alphabet is created [...] the Greeks adapted the Phoenician alphabet to their culture [...] The archaic alphabet of the Greeks is transmitted to the Etruscans, and then to the Latins [...] Civilizations such as Athens, Alexandria, and Rome were large centers of written production for the making of books that exported to the world known in ancient times. However, copying by hand, which was the one used, was long and expensive, because only temples and some wealthy people owned books” (Quoted by Peña, 2008, pp. 98-99).

In summary, four fundamental aspects are deduced from the quote. First, the alphabet had a Semitic origin, but the borrowing of languages was adapted from there. A second element creates a written culture restricted to a dominant social class. Third, the cultural practices that are born with reading and writing modify the life of ancient men, and also, great centers of written production are created. Fourth, the pedagogical model was based on repetition and copying of the letter, restricting the writing process to the acquisition of the written code in order to decipher it and then compare it with memory.

CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, written culture is a historic achievement that has enabled the creation of writing systems based on the development of humanity. Consequently, the technology of the word is an example that fulfilled administrative functions, but also allowed the registry that would later be used for annual and scholar use, laying the foundations for a future development of critical thinking.

Secondly, the ancient writing tried to emulate speech, since there was a transition process between orality and writing, therefore, the content of the writing was something that was said out loud, since the restoration of the voice was crucial for the intention of meaning.

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Thirdly, the writing was characterized for being analogical, metaphorical, and poetic where an endless number of meanings were registered in some inarticulate way. So, the reader had to make a synthesis between the lines to find the hidden meanings, in which the interpretation is being revealed as a form of an epiphany.

Fourthly, writing was considered as a mnemonic resource to remember or record facts, economic activities, and laws due to knowledge was in memory and also it was executed by the organs of hearing. In this way, the gods instructed that knowledge to which the scribes and priests had access, maintaining communication with the natural and divine world.

Finally, a model of grammatical and prescriptive writing forges a pedagogy based on this practice, which consisted in sharpening memory through copying and dictation. But the relevant thing is that even in the 21st century, this pedagogical practice remains in force in the classroom, hence the need to transform that traditional practice into another innovative.

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