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Research Article

"When I see a sale, I say: 'Ah! But when will this expire?'": Pragmatic Relations in the Practices of Reading Expiration Dates by Older Women Literacy Students

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Abstract

This study analyses how older (mostly 60 years or over) women who are literacy students at Youth and Adult Education Program in a small village of Brazil appropriate school numeracy practices during a class about the discursive genre "label" and the information it conveys. We focus on the students' participation in the discursive interactions that take place in events involving concepts, ideas, procedures, rules, and values related to reading and registering the system used to write expiration dates. Using an example, we discuss how the different modes of this appropriation carried out by the students change the didactical activity and innovatively forge the pedagogical relationship.

Keywords: aging women; appropriation of numeracy practices; Young, Adult and Elderly Education (YAE) Program; innovation; pedagogical relationships

Here, we explore the different ways of appropriating discursive and, as such, sociocultural practices in school mathematics by aging women (mostly 60 years or over), students in a literacy class in the Youth and Adult (and Elderly) Education (YAE) program. We seek to understand the different modes of appropriation carried out by students, which are made possible by a school activity. In the event presented here as an example, the teacher planned an activity for students to read label information of a store-bought packaged cake. This reading involves numeracy practices dealing with mathematical representations, criterium, and culture to locate, read, understand, and decide how to use *expiration date* information and other contents on the label. We want to highlight an innovation that is not in the didactic exploration of the syntactic and semantic dimensions involved in the reading of a code or understanding that it indicates the last day a product must be consumed without risks. The innovation is in how students summon – and the teacher welcomes – pragmatic dimensions of knowledge to forge meaning conditions to the social practice of writing, reading, and using expiration dates on labels.

Indeed, the teacher's initial proposal was to

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develop with the students a metalinguistic analysis of the genre "label," to explain the syntactic aspects (codes and system functioning) of reading an expiration date, and its semantic aspects (the meaning of the expiration date and the restrictions it imposes on the consumption of products). This proposal, however, is confronted by the narratives of students' tactics to access the information that the date record conveys, even if not fully understanding the system, and of the use they make of this information. These tactics and uses are incorporated into the meaning processes carried out by students, building a new teaching-learning relationship. This new relationship is established in the discursive positioning of those women that highlights the pragmatic dimension of reading expiration dates and considering their relevance for decision making. This positioning institutes and legitimizes not only other ways of reading labels and acting as consumers, but other practices of reading and naming the world (Freire, 1967), by dealing with its production, consumption, communication, and control relations.

The studies we have carried out or followed indicate that syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions of numeracy practices coexist and are usually explicitly mobilized by young, adult, and elderly participants in YAE in their efforts to signify school mathematics practices. As in Fonseca (2020), we relate to the syntactic dimension of numeracy practices, the knowledge and consideration of the technical rules that govern the relationships between the mathematical lexicon elements, procedures, and concepts. The semantic dimension approach contemplates – and problematizes – an understanding of the denotative function of (mathematical) language, and considers the relational perspective through which meanings are produced for those elements, procedures, and concepts. Finally, we refer to the pragmatic dimension when paying attention to the functioning of mathematical language, concepts, and processes, according to the uses and intentions of subjects in the discursive interactions in which these mathematical language, concepts, or processes are mobilized or contemplated. Intentions and uses are not influenced, however, by just personal and fortuitous motivations and actions: they are historical and parameterized by sociocultural conditions and references of the subjects, shaping their ways of relating to the mathematical text.

Theoretical Perspectives

Social situations involving the use of reading and writing increasingly demand knowledge that involves quantification, measurement, space orientation, and classification practices. These practices make up the ways of using written language and are established by them, not only because mathematical representations are present in written texts, but because written culture itself, which constitutes them, "is also permeated by principles based on the same rationality that forges or parameterizes these [numeracy] practices and which is reinforced by them" (Fonseca, 2020, p. 398). Therefore, this article is in line with Brazilian studies that use the term *numeracy practices,* in a discursive and, as such, in a sociocultural and historical perspective, to contemplate dilemmas, interpretations, valuations, choices, compositions, impositions, confrontations, adaptations or resistances, which permeate social practices that involve dealing with ideas, representations or mathematical criteria, in various instances of social life (Fonseca, 2020).

In this sense, we want to reflect on these aging women's involvement with school numeracy practices and how it requires and

provides opportunities for the *responsive exercise of understanding* (Volóchinov, 2018) and the production of meanings for and in such practices. To focus on this exercise and this production, we use the concept of *appropriation of social practices* inspired by Ana Luiza Smolka's (2000) approach based on a Vygotskian perspective.

According to Smolka (2000), appropriation, referring to "ways of *making one's own*", or even "*making proper, suitable* to socially established values and norms," could be used "as a perfectly equivalent synonym for internalization, as it also assumes something the individual takes from *outside* (from somewhere) and from someone (another)" (p. 28, author's highlights). However, the author chooses the term *appropriation* to relate the processes through which people take ownership of social practices to the issue of meaning, in a historical-cultural perspective.

In the case of this article, we mobilize this concept to highlight the discursive processes through which aging women, students in literacy process in YAE, deal with school and/or hegemonic numeracy practices and produce their own meanings for them. Because the practices are historical and these women are historical subjects (Freire, 2005), but also because the hegemonic numeracy practices and illiterate women were not always on the same side of history, making these practices *their own* "does not exactly mean, and does not always coincide with *making adequate* to social expectations. There are ways of *making one's own*, which are not *appropriate* or *relevant* to the other" (Smolka, 2000, p. 32, author's highlights). Therefore, it is possible to observe several tensions, in the processes of appropriating numeracy practices, since, in the game of social positions, what is seen as *appropriate* is not always clear, adequate, or transparent (Smolka, 2000).

From this perspective, the appropriation processes are not identified with the idea of learning if it is considered as an exclusively cognitive or even behavioral process. *Appropriation* of school numeracy practices happens even in situations in which the students in literacy process, eventually, do not behave as expected when the teacher undertook the pedagogical interventions. In this sense, we turn our gaze to those aging women, seeking to (re)know them, producing types of learning based on aspects of their relationship with school mathematics, their expectations regarding schooling, their demands, criticisms, and desires. However, we are also aware of the tensions and discomforts these students faced by the need, established by the dynamics of school context and social life beyond the school walls, to adapt themselves to socially valued standards.

Therefore, the use of the *appropriation of social practices* concept is a way to explain the active role these students play in the processes of understanding the world, which are established when these women confront, signify, evaluate, use, narrate, value, or reject numeracy practices in the school context. That is, the mobilization of the concept of appropriation of numeracy practices helps us identify the active role of those aging students when responding to the demands of social interactions in school, responses that are conformed in the different ways in they participate in school practices and attribute meanings to them, informed by their life experiences and sociocultural characteristics.

From this perspective, operationalizing this concept of appropriation allows us to perceive how women in an aging process participate, in different ways, in certain discursive practices – in this case, school numeracy practices – not limiting our analysis to an evaluation of their

learning success, what would transform learning into "a matter of possession, ownership, or even a mastery, individually achieved" (Smolka, 2000, p. 37) of the skills, concepts, and procedures involved in the hegemonic numeracy practices reiterated by the school. By using this concept, we want to see these women in an aging process assuming a social dimension of belonging and participation in (and of) social practices.

Mathematical representation systems give form and communicability, lend arguments and establish powers to interactions that make up various practices of social life. Taking numeracy practices as discursive –and, as such, sociocultural and historical– practices lead us to discuss "the *meanings* of human action, the *sense* of practices, considering that all actions acquire multiple meanings, multiple senses, and become significant practices, depending on the positions and modes of participation of subjects in relationships" (Smolka, 2000, p. 31, author's highlights).

Research Context and Methodology

Literacy and education rates among elderly people in Brazil are the lowest among its adult population. The Newsletter-2019 published by the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2019) associates illiteracy with age, as illiteracy rate among people aged 60 years and over (18.0%, equivalent to almost 6 million illiterates) is considerably higher than in other age groups, decreasing as age cohorts include younger people. Moreover, it should be noted that illiteracy rates among elderly women had been higher than among men over 60 years in all PNADs prior to 2019, although the gender gap appears to be decreasing (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2019). The situation of elderly and aging women reflects the intense inequalities between women and men and can be seen from different social markers (ethnic, racial, class, generational, religious, professional, among others), which define the relationship possibilities among people and between them and knowledge and institutions, in various instances of social life, including the school space.

Because they have lived in a context of deprivation, restrictions, and exclusions, elderly illiterate women also see education as a means of overcoming a social condition that, in general, is not favorable to them. Many, having been deprived of school education as children or adolescents, seek school in adulthood or even old age. They see YAE as an important space to seek social and cultural inclusion.

Nevertheless, their presence at classroom, in many ways, changes the pedagogical relation when they summon – and the teacher welcomes – pragmatic dimensions of knowledge to forge meaning conditions to the social practice of writing, reading, and using scholar or hegemonic ideas, concepts, procedures or codes. To show this, in this paper, we submit an event, occurred in 2018, to a discourse analysis in order to exemplify how aged women become protagonists of a learning scene at school. We identified this event on the empirical material produced in a study we developed in a YAE literacy class of an alternative education project, known as ABC Institute, in a small village (Barroso), in the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil. This project, in addition to developing social actions that assist socially-vulnerable woman and men, offers elementary education to youths and adults of all ages, including the elderly. The classes happened in the morning, from 8 am to 10 am, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The teacher prepared the activities, considering YAE textbooks, the

Institute's pedagogical proposal, and students' demands and interests.

The research participants were the 12 students (all women) and the teacher. The students intersected vulnerable social markers: women, illiterate, black, poor, surviving from their work as domestic maids or farm workers (and/or donations), most of them were married or widows, with many children, and aging. During the fieldwork, the teacher was 28 years old and the students ranged between 53 and 91 years old. In Brazil, people over 60 years are legally considered elderly. However, because we understand aging as a relational process (involving historical, social, cultural, economic, physical, functional, and mental aspects), we have decided to use the expression *aging women* to all students, who established a non-static relationship (sometimes of belonging, others of denial) with aging, its conditions and restrictions, and ongoing nature.

All the procedures to produce the empirical material of this research were adopted seeking to enable us to consider interpretations, beliefs, and values of the relationships these students establish in (and with) the school context. We wanted to understand classroom events in the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts that restrict or enhance the subjects' production of meanings in their appropriation of school practices.

These contexts, personal relationships, and life experiences allowed us to perceive the creation of this classroom culture through the ways the students dealt with the socialized knowledge. Although, in this article, we analyze one event, our discussion is only possible because we could confront this 51-second interaction to others identified in 164 hours of observation, and considering the 12 one-hour semi-structured interviews with the students in their homes, and the interviews with the teacher and director in the school. We also consulted the institution's documentation, the teaching materials, and students' written production.

To analyze the event presented in this paper, we adopt Social Analysis of Discourse proposed by Norman Fairclough to understand the discursive dynamics of a YAE mathematics classroom establishing processes of numeracy practices appropriation. Considering discourse as a practice of giving meaning to the world and not just representing it, Fairclough (1992) proposes a three-dimensional analysis that considers the textual, discursive, and social practice dimensions implied in reading practices. It allows reflecting on the constitution of subjects through discourse, and their transformative action in social practices when they produce discursive practices.

Our description of a classroom event considers its historical character, connected to different situations at school and outside, allowing the triangulation of different aspects and data of the empirical material, with theoretical resources and data from other works investigating YAE mathematics classes. In this description, we focus subjects' lexical choice (textual analysis) in their positions and discursive intensions (discursive analysis). However, it also allows us to recognize that these positions interfere in social practice and are constrained by it (social practice analysis).

In an YAE Classroom

We focus on a literacy classroom event that took place on August 8, 2018, involving eight students: Ana (56 years old), Aparecida (56), Cecília (91), Joana (63), Terezinha (64), Zélia (61), Edilsea (53) and Olga (73). The teacher, Vanessa, who had informed us that she would start working with women's "day-to-day" issues and brought to

the classroom a photo of the label of a packaged banana cake, printed on bond paper (Figure 1). The activity emerged from the pedagogical dynamics, planned, and established by the teacher to carry out a metalinguistic analysis of the discursive genre "label."

FIGURE 1: Photo of the banana cake label printed on the sheet distributed by the teacher

Source: Teaching material produced by the teacher for the August 8th class.

To clarify the set of information this text conveys (as it interests cake producers and consumers and/or to meet legal requirements) the teacher pasted several envelopes on the board: inside each one of them, there was a form with the name of one of the elements on a label students should identify (brand, expiration, ingredients, image, nutritional information, manufacture, bar code, company name, and product name). The teacher named the activity *"Reading labels."* The order in which these elements would be considered in the discussion would be random, depending on the blind choice made by a student invited to go to the board to choose an envelope (without knowing which form it contained). The first element of the discursive label genre, drawn by Edilsea for study in that class, was "expiration." Table 1 below shows the interaction motivated by the draw of this element.

TABLE 1: ***"When there is, sometimes, a sale, I say: 'Ah! But when is this going to expire?"***

Class on August 8, 2018 Wednesday – 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. – 49th day of class observation Recording time: 01:05:04 to 01:05:55 *(Duration: 51s)*		
Class time	**Participant**	**Speech**
01:05:04	**Vanessa**	*So, look, inside these little cards here...* [Points to the envelopes taped to the board.] *... they are the characteristics of the label. So, we'll pick them, each time one will choose, so we can talk about each one, ok? So Edilsea will choose first.* [She pushes Edilsea's wheelchair to the blackboard and the student takes out an envelope, takes the paper inside and reads it.]
01:05:15	**Edilsea**	*Expiration*
01:05:20	**Vanessa**	*Expiration. So, every product we're going to buy... a food product, right? ... that we eat. All products have an expiration date, ok? So, let's register there in the notebook. Can you identify the expiration of this product? This banana cake?* [Each student begins to look up the information on the printed sheet they have received.] *What is the expiration?*

01:05:21	**Edilsea**	*Eight days.*
01:05:22	**Vanessa**	*Eight days. Look where the expiration date is written.* [She lifts the label sheet and points to the word "expiration" to show it to other students who were unable to locate the information.] *It's written like this: 'made in…' And the 'expiration: eight days'. This must be a homemade cake, right? Eight days, ok? So, we're going to register each feature. I'll put the title there: 'Reading labels'. Does everyone know what a label is?*) [Write the title on the board. Nobody answered the teacher's question, because they started to copy the title on the board.] *So, the first thing we saw is the expiration. Every food product and even others, have an expiration date. Why is it important to have an "expiration date" on the product?*
01:05:26	**Joana**	*So we don't eat something spoiled.*
01:05:27	**Vanessa**	*Do you normally check the expiration date of the products you buy?*
01:05:28	**Terezinha**	*I do. But, to be honest, I don't know how to check.*
01:05:29	**Vanessa**	*You don't know, right?*
01:05:29	**Aparecida**	*I check.*
01:05:30	**Terezinha**	*I ask someone to check it for me.*
01:05:31	**Vanessa**	*Usually, the expiration comes as a date. This one is different.* [Points to the expiration period on the banana cake label.] *Here is the shelf life: eight days. So, I have to look at the manufacturing date. So, let's assume my product is made today. Today is the eighth. Then, you have to count eight days ahead, which is its expiration date But, generally, expiration comes in number, for example, let's say I bought the biscuit today and it says: 'expiration date:…' let's assume 'December two, two thousand and eighteen'.* [Writes the date on the board: '02/12/2018'[1].] *Until when can I consume this product? Day two; the twelve here represents which month? Do you know?*
01:05:34	**Aparecida**	*Two?*
01:05:35	**Vanessa**	*Twelve*
01:05:36	**Aparecida**	*Ah! December.*
01:05:37	**Vanessa**	*It's the last month.*
01:05:37	**Aparecida**	*Yeah!*
01:05:38	**Vanessa**	*So, it lasts until December tenth, two thousand and eighteen.*
01:05:39	**Edilsea**	*Ah! It doesn't last all that!* [Says in a playful tone, suggesting that, regardless of the product's durability, it would be eaten before the official expiration.]

1 In Brazil, date format is day/month/year.

01:05:40	**Vanessa**	*It doesn't last, right? …* [Seeming to understand Edilsea's joke.] *Or it can stay in the supermarket until that date, right? And this is very serious, we really have to be aware of it. When we can't check it, we ask for someone. But soon you will be able to see* [meaning understanding it].
01:05:41	**Aparecida**	*I like to check mostly canned food.*
01:05:43	**Terezinha**	*When there is sometimes a sale, I say: 'Ah! But when will this expire?*
01:05:44	**Vanessa**	*Yeah, you have to keep an eye on it, because the product in sale is almost expiring.*
01:05:45	**Aparecida**	*There's milk.*
01:05:45	**Vanessa**	*Milk is more perishable. There are products that expire faster, like milk, products that we call perishable, right? They will expire quickly.*
01:05:47	**Aparecida**	*Yeah.*
01:05:48	**Vanessa**	*So, our product, its expiration is eight days, right? So, we'll write it down there. If the cake had been made today, could I eat it until what day?*
01:05:49	**Terezinha**	*Huh?*
01:05:50	**Vanessa**	*This cake expires in eight days. So, imagine it was manufactured today. Until what day can I eat it?* [Aparecida seems to be thinking about the teacher's question, because she stares at the board; but Joana is the one who answers the question.]
01:05:51	**Joana**	*Until Tuesday.*
01:05:52	**Vanessa**	*Eight days ahead, which day? … The sixteen. Let's see what day it is.*
01:05:53	**Aparecida**	*It'll be next Thursday.*
01:05:54	**Vanessa**	*Right.*
01:05:55	**Aparecida**	*I'm good at sums. It's a piece of cake.*

Source: Transcript of the class record-August 08, 2018.

"So we don't eat something spoiled": Following the Values and Routines of Hegemonic Social Practice

Vanessa's first statement about the expiration date (at 01:05:20) emphasizes the relevance and the universality of registering products' expiration date on their label, especially food. (*Expiration. So, every product we're going to buy… a food product, right? … that we eat. All products have an expiration date, ok?*). In Brazil, the label of all food packed in the absence of the consumer and ready for consumption must declare the expiration date.

After establishing expiration date as mandatory on product labels, Vanessa, within her textual analysis project, turns her pedagogical intervention to the ability to locate this information in the text. So, she asks students if they could identify the expiration date on the cake label. Immediately, Edilsea, who was familiar with this date recording system (numerical-verbal: "*08 days*"), locates the information and gives the expected response ("*Eight days*").

Edilsea's correct and immediate answer could indicate the *appropriation* of this date recording

system, if we were using an *appropriation* concept related with "the idea of performance and well-successful actions carrying out by the individual" (Smolka, 2000, p. 32). The teacher's concern to allow all students to answer like Edilsea reiterates this perspective.

In fact, realizing that identifying the expiration date on the label and reading it might not be easy for all students, the teacher raises the sheet in front of the class to show the location of the information (*"Look where the expiration date is written."*). We initially hypothesized that this procedure could have been a consequence of how the label was printed, as the information was written in a small print, making it difficult to be seen by students with visual limitations (due to age or health problems). This hypothesis is related to our concern with the production of teaching materials that meet the needs of people with some visual impairment, as is the case with many aging students.

However, in her intervention to help identify the information, the teacher does not only point out the model sheet, for students to locate it on their own sheets, but she also informs which linguistic resources are used to convey the information. She gives tips on the style of the text: *"It's written like this: 'made in...' And the 'expiration: eight days".*

Afterwards, Vanessa abandons textual analysis and calls on the students to produce an inference, based on the interpretation of information: *"This must be a homemade cake, right? Eight days, ok?"*. The teacher probably refers to the high perishability of homemade products. Vanessa's comment on the nature of the banana cake suggests that she assumes her interlocutors would be familiar with the cultural practice of making homemade cakes and evaluating how long they would stay fresh and safe. This assumption may have taken into account the teacher's assessment of students' social, family, and financial conditions and demands throughout their lives. These women, with grown-up children and grandchildren, probably baked cakes for the family or would seldom buy this type of product. According to Britto da Motta (1999), the vulnerable conditions of elderly women can be directly associated with their social class, family arrangements, and life experiences: "being old can mean living in great poverty, or even in misery, even for those originally from the middle class, because it is a generation with little participation in the labor market and, therefore, with few personal resources for survival" (p. 210). Therefore, Vanessa's comment mobilizes a knowledge that is supposed to be shared, related to this cultural practice (Pino, 2004) of baking and – eventually – buying cakes.

Students do not agree or disagree with Vanessa's comment, as their attention was on the technical task of locating the information. Nevertheless, the exercise proposed had met its declared pedagogical purpose: working with something familiar to students' daily lives (*"from day-to-day"*) or that could contribute to a daily task (*"check the expiration date"*).

However, this purpose succumbs to traditional school practices and the didactic intentions of that literacy activity, which focused on learning the written text structure. These intentions, tacitly agreed between the participants, make everyone focus on the written task proposed (*"So, we're going to register each feature. I'll put the title there: 'Reading labels'."*), thus, not answering the teachers' question (*Does everyone know what a label is?*).

Vanessa's question indicates that she thinks students might not understand the term *label*, its role, or even did not identify it on its original support (since it was presented to them on a printed

copy, not in the product). After establishing the topic of textual analysis (*"So, the first thing we saw is the expiration"*), Vanessa reiterates the discursive practice that establishes the label genre (*"Every food product, and even others, have an expiration date."*) and seeks to direct the discussion to the need of registering an expiration date on the label (*"Why is it important to have 'expiration date' on the product?"*).

If the teacher's question refers to a requirement of this discursive genre, Joana's answer assumes the reader as the protagonist, justifying the importance of accessing such information to decide about consuming (or not) a certain product: *"So we don't eat something spoiled"*. In this sense, Joana appropriates (and reproduces) the discourse, constructed and established by certain cultural groups, against the consumption of products after the expiration date, rather than deciding based on the visual (or olfactory, or taste, for example) characteristics the products.

"I do. But, to be honest, I don't know how to check.": Pragmatic Relationships in the Practices of Reading Expiration Dates

In the teacher's question *"Do you normally check the expiration date of the products you buy?"*, we may listen to the echoes of an adhesion to a social practice (consider the expiration date before buying a product). But when referring to the students' everyday practices, this question places them as subjects (of the practice and of the sentence) of the verb *"check,"* which, strictly speaking, involves *locating*, *reading,* and *considering* this information.

Nevertheless, Terezinha dissociates these three activities the teacher summarized into the verb *"check."* She claims *to consider* the expiration date but confesses not knowing how *to read* this information (and perhaps not even *locating* it): *"I do. But, to be honest, I don't know how to check."* This dissociation reflects Terezinha's lifelong interdictions established by her illiterate condition, due to her economic and cultural exclusion from school when young, as stated in an interview: *"My parents didn't study and couldn't read. They wouldn't let us go to class, because they said we would learn to write letters to our boyfriends, you know? So, only the men studied... But even so, it wasn't possible to study much, because they worked on the farm."*

During the interview, Terezinha further elaborated on her extreme poverty, before reaching retirement (when she first had her own money): *"I've faced so much hunger that now I eat everything I want to eat. It may be expensive, but if I feel like eating it, I'll eat it."* Such deprivations prevented her from developing purchase protocols, as she lived mainly on donations. Among these protocols, the practice of "*normally check the expiration date of the products you buy."*

From this perspective, the way Terezinha answers Vanessa's question points out pragmatic relationships with the text, which seem to have escaped the teacher when she asks about their practice of checking expiration dates: some women were not literate in this registration system; others did not make their own purchases, depending on the help of other people, institutions, social programs, trusting that their benefactors would not donate expired products, or renouncing this consumption criterion, or even not worrying about it; others, in turn, depended on family members to buy what they needed, so these relatives established the purchase criteria; other women bought or consumed based on brand, price, appearance, texture, aroma, or need, disregarding the expiration date; and others trusted that shop owners and/or employees would not display products that could not be consumed.

Further, Terezinha reiterates the dissociation between, on one hand, knowing the specific codes and understanding expiration date writing systems, and, on the other, the practice of

reading. In fact, the teacher's answer (*"You don't know, right?"*) suggests that she would not be surprised by the fact that Terezinha (and probably other silent students) did not know how to *check* the expiration date. Terezinha's reply challenges the possible conclusion that the student would be completely distanced from that reading practice. Terezinha explains her tactic for accessing this information and its pragmatic use: *"I ask someone to check it for me."*

Terezinha's discursive position also challenges the school logic that assumes the impossibility of participation in the reading practice by those who do not master the writing system used. This reasoning is associated not only to a conception of reading practice, but also to ways of seeing the world and valuing skills, that support this conception and, consequently, the school practices of teaching reading (Soares, 1998). When expressing her willingness to ask someone, Terezinha, despite her inability to *"check"* the expiration date, reiterates the value she gives to that information, her knowledge that it is in the label, her understanding of what it means, her ability to assess and use it, as well as recognizing her insertion in that social practice.

The teacher, in turn, didactically works to make students appropriate stylistic aspects and the semantics to register expiration dates. This is evident, for example, when explaining how records of these dates could appear on packages, presenting the linguistic resources used (*"Usually, the expiration, it comes as a date. This one is different. Here is the shelf life: eight days. So, I have to look at the manufacturing date."*); when she proposes examples with a hypothetical cake production date so they could calculate the expiration date (*"So, let's assume my product is made today. Today it's the eighth. Then, you have to count eight days ahead, which is its expiration date."*); or, still, when she hypothetically proposes the label of another product, with the expiration date registered differently, to teach them how to decode this record (*"But, generally, expiration comes in number, for example, let's say I bought the biscuit today and it says: 'expiration date:...' let's assume 'December two, two thousand and eighteen'. Until when can I consume this product?"*).

Vanessa's effort to maintain a faithful structure to the principles of school numeracy practice reveals a semantic and syntactic concern, assuming that studying a banana cake label would ease the understanding of typically school aspects related to expiration dates (location, writing, reading and decoding system, calculations, and estimations). On the other hand, there is also a pragmatic dimension that guides her activity proposal – seeking a supposedly familiar situation of identifying and reading labels.

Therefore, even in a traditional school approach to reading (metalinguistic analysis activities, fictitious context exercises), Vanessa acknowledges those students as learning women: *"But soon you will be able to see."* However, valuing the pragmatic dimension of that reading practice, addressed in the interaction by Joana (*"So we don't eat something spoiled."*), by Aparecida (*"I do."*), by Terezinha (*"I ask someone to check it for me."*) and by Edilsea (*"Ah! It doesn't last all that!"*), the teacher reiterates the greater importance of using the information in relation to the technique of decoding it (*"And this is very serious, we really have to be aware of it. When we can't check it, we ask for someone."*), and confirms students' role as interaction protagonists. In addition, in her responses to the students' interventions (*"It doesn't last, right?"*; *"Yeah, you have to keep an eye on it."*; *"Milk is more perishable."*), Vanessa also recognizes them as women who produce knowledge and culture.

Recognizing those students as subjects of knowledge –as they add their tactics, values, and decisions to the practice of reading expiration

dates– refers to Freire's understanding of creating and transforming knowledge in the constitution of the subject. In his first writings, discussing education as a practice of freedom, Freire already pointed out that people's relationships with reality "result from being-with it and being-in it, through acts of creation, recreation, and decision" (Freire, 1967, p. 43). This allowed them to streamline their world, dominate their reality, humanizing it. In the pedagogical relationship, the teacher and students value the ways they instantiate the practice of reading expiration dates, though not everyone knows how to "check them." Each one adds something they do: "It temporalizes geographical spaces. It makes culture" (p. 43)

Considering the research participants as women of learning and knowledge implies recognizing this cultural group of aging women, students of a literacy course in YAE, as a group able to appropriate new knowledge (including school knowledge) by attributing new meanings, confronting them with knowledge they mobilize and produce in the interaction. Appropriation "is not a simple operation that can be reduced to a mere learning process" (Pino, 1993, p. 22); it is related to the problem of meaning and how subjects interpret, participate, and position themselves in a given social situation to make *their own* socially valued criteria, rules, and knowledge (Smolka, 2000).

Students' replies and interventions show their condition as knowledge-producing women. Positioning themselves in relation to the importance of reading expiration dates and the tactics to access them, these women evoke the knowledge that "already exists in society in form of productions and social practices" (Pino, 2004, p. 448), re-signifying it and making it *their own*. In these processes, they see themselves as women of knowledge: they operate knowledge produced and used by people from their or other cultural groups. Thus, they place themselves as protagonists of social practices involving reading the expiration dates: *"So we don't eat something spoiled."*; *"I check."*; *"I ask someone to check for me."*; *"I like to see mostly canned food."*; *"I say..."*; *"I'm good at sums."*

"When there is sometimes a sale, I say: 'Ah! But when will this expire?": Dialectical Relationship Between Pragmatic, Syntactic, and Semantic Aspects of Reading the Expiration Date

In this school activity, through the teacher's mediation, the students Aparecida, Joana, Terezinha, and Edilsea seek to understand the semantic and pragmatic meanings attributed to the expiration date of the cake. Based on them, they produce new discourses and/or reiterate already established ones. As indicated by appropriation studies based on the historical-cultural current (Pino, 1993; 2004; Smolka, 2000), the knowledge mobilized and produced by these women, expressed in their discourse, emerges from the dialectical relationship established between them and "another," parameterizing what they elect to known: in this case, the registration systems for expiration dates defined by the knowledge and the pragmatic intentions of social groups that produce and use them.

These appropriation studies help us to understand that these women's act of knowing is "an activity of a semiotic nature" (Pino, 2004, p. 450), thus, it is a social production "of many 'others', which constitute itself into guides in the activity of knowing" (Pino, 2004, p. 458). In this sense, not only the teacher, but each classmate, objectifying the world in their utterances, contributes to the class knowledge and culture, allowing them to reconnect with each other and with themselves, companions of its small *culture circle* (Freire, 2005).

In this sense, we consider that socially produced knowledge about *"checking"* (locating, reading, and considering) expiration dates is a cultural good that these women appropriate not only in that class, but throughout their lives, in the events they experienced or witnessed, which they summoned up in this interaction. In this appropriation movement, women produce their own meanings in the confrontation of pragmatic values and intentions in which the "dialectical, procedural, contradictory relationship" is forged (Freire, 1992, p. 36) between language, thought, and world.

The students play a leading role in the meaning processes. Edilsea reads the information on the label (*"Eight days."*), asses the reasonableness of a hypothetical example (*"Ah! It doesn't last all that!"*), and adds other variables than just the risk of product deterioration. Joana states the reason for reading labels (*"So we don't eat something spoiled."*) and uses the information on the expiration date to calculate until when the cake could be eaten – thus entering into the "order of discourse" established in the proposed numeracy practice (*"Until Tuesday."*). Aparecida demarcates her relationship with this numeracy practice by affirming its (*"I check."*). Later she demonstrates her mastering of the system (*"Ah! December,"*; *"Yeah!"*; *"It'll be next Thursday."*; *"I'm good at sums. It's a piece of cake."*) and share her pragmatic knowledge and assessment of its usage and relevance (*"I like to check mostly canned food."*; *"There's milk."*).

Likewise, Terezinha, when explaining a pragmatic use of reading the expiration date, though she does not know how to do it, once again demarcates this dissociation between mastering the technique and using it. The phrase "*When there is sometimes a sale, I say: 'Ah! But when will this expire?"* is a strong example of the supremacy of pragmatism over the syntactic and semantic aspects. Terezinha indicates the "sale" because this is a practice that she (an elderly woman, student at a literacy course of YAE, widow, alone and responsible for her own purchases, after living in extreme poverty) often encounters, when entering shops and seeing eye-catching posters (or images on leaflets) with reduced-price products. In this sense, for Terezinha, not knowing to read the expiration date does not prevent her from recognizing and participating in the commercial practice of prominently displaying products close to their expiration dates as "*on sale*". When interviewed, Cecília also reiterated her opinion about supermarket operations and the care with expired products: *"because sometimes they put expired things in the supermarket. We have to be smart."*

If we consider the articulation between discourse and social structure (or, more generally, between social practice and social structure), thus establishing a dialectical relationship (Fairclough, 1992), we can infer that Terezinha, by adopting her tactic and making it explicit in that interaction, provokes and highlights a dissociation from typically school teaching and learning practices, which tend to be restricted to syntactic and, at most, semantic aspects of knowledge. In this sense, Terezinha and her classmates summons knowledge, values, tactics, and skills they produce and appropriate in other social spaces, at different stages of their aging process, living as poor, black, mostly widow women, and YAE students.

Thus, the discourse assumed by Terezinha articulates new meanings to the pedagogical relationship, calling for a dialogue between the school practice of reading expiration dates and the commercial practice with which she is more familiar. Terezinha's disposition for this articulation reiterates how the discourse contributes to the construction of *social identities* and *subject positions* for *social subjects* and *types of self* as

well as constructing social relationships between people and systems of knowledge and belief. Thus, individual and collective processes of meaning the world are dialectically forged in and through discourse, constituting and constructing the world into meaning (Fairclough, 1992). Among these meaning processes, we highlight those in which we identified the appropriation of numeracy practices, which, as social practices, are produced by the world and by students themselves and have the effect of also producing them and the world.

Final Remarks

From the perspective of innovation in developing numeracy practices, we do not consider the teachers' didactic strategy as innovative in itself. Although she intended to deal with students' everyday issues, her first proposal was a metalinguistic approach explaining the characteristics of the genre "label." The innovative attitude was how she received students' contributions and criticisms to give meaning to the social practice of recording and reading expiration dates. More than learning the syntactic aspects of a registration system or the semantic translation of mathematical symbols into a piece of information, the students could deal with numeracy by creating tactics to produce meanings in and for it.

By making what was presented to them as their own and signifying it (Smolka, 2000) when participating in a school numeracy practice, students reframe not only the syntactic and semantic dimensions that involve the registration of expiration dates, but also their condition as elderly poor black illiterate women facing date registration system. This relational approach to the process of appropriating school numeracy practices indicates the emergence of aging women, YAE students, who actively position themselves and (re)structure school practices, not resigning to be positioned, conformed, or inferiorized by those practices. Fairclough (1992) points out this dialectical constitution of the subject, sometimes an active agent in discursive practices, sometimes an ideological effect of social conditions and power relations.

In this sense, the students' and teacher's positions in this pedagogical activity help us see the discourse as socially constituted and socially constitutive, contributing to the constitution of all social structure dimensions which, directly or indirectly, shape and restrict its norms and conventions, underlying relationships, identities, and institutions (Fairclough, 1992).

On one hand, the interaction indicates teacher's efforts to teach students to identify and read expiration dates. On the other hand, student's speeches problematize this intention of acculturation: in their movement of appropriating the practice of reading expiration dates, they call the tactic of asking for the help of others, or the insight that they need to pay more attention to this date when the products are in sale. Indeed, their discursive positioning does not only express individual issues, but is conditioned by broader social structures, in a relationship between discourse and social practice.

Hence, the confrontation between everyday social practices and school practices, in this and other events with aging YAE women in the ABC Institute show us the dialectical dimension of the relationship between social practice and discursive practice. If there is a movement to constrain the discourse imposed by school practice (reading expiration dates), there is also an innovative autonomy of these women to (re)signify this practice based on how life is produced and relationships are established (Fairclough, 1992).

Students and educators (teachers and researchers) innovate the pedagogical relationship beyond or despite the purpose of teaching and learning the date recording system, by instituting a *dialogicity* (Freire, 2005) in that classroom. The students' demands, knowledge, and procedures not aligned with the hegemonic practice of reading expiration dates were summoned by the dialogical disposition of the educational practice: the educators innovate by looking at what is considered, in general, small, trivial, or despicable; the students, by establishing the possibility of collective production of knowledge, not only on the technique of reading expiration dates, or on the metric information they convey, but as a critical articulation of individual life experiences in the constitution of social practice.

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