

**Revisiting Grammar teaching issues from a Bakhtinian  
point of view / *Revisitando questões de gramática e de ensino de  
um ponto de vista bakhtiniano***

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**ABSTRACT**

The objective of this article is to discuss the issues of Grammar and its teaching from a discursive perspective, facing the challenge in teaching grammar: to avoid the trap of simple memorization of rules that not always correspond to their practical application. Having as reference the theoretical reflections present in Bakhtin's teaching notes (2004) and the dialogical theory of the Circle, we aim to discuss the problem of punctuation used in the literary text. The punctuation, as an ideographical set of signals, can be used in structuring sentences, creating unexpected effects, many times in opposition to the norm, thus contributing to the author's artistic project. Clarice Lispector's work, *A hora da estrela* (1984) was chosen as an object of analysis. Thus it is expected to throw some light on the aspects of punctuation marks and their stylistic effects, leading to a more critical approach to teach Grammar.

**KEYWORDS:** Grammar; Punctuation, Style; Literature, Teaching

**RESUMO**

*O objetivo deste artigo é discutir a questão da gramática e do ensino numa perspectiva discursiva, enfrentando um desafio no ensino da Gramática: escapar da memorização simples de regras que nem sempre correspondem à sua aplicação prática. Tomando como referência reflexões teóricas fundamentadas nas anotações de aula de Bakhtin (2004) e na teoria dialógica do Círculo, procura-se discutir a questão do emprego da pontuação no texto literário. A pontuação, como sinal ideográfico, auxilia a estruturação de períodos, criando efeitos inusitados, muitas vezes na contramão das normas gramaticais, contribuindo assim com o projeto artístico do autor. Para efeito de análise foi selecionada a obra de Clarice Lispector, *A hora da estrela* (1984). Espera-se, com este trabalho, iluminar aspectos referentes aos sinais de pontuação e aos efeitos estilísticos de seu emprego, possibilitando uma reflexão crítica a respeito do ensino da gramática.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Gramática; Pontuação; Estilo; Literatura; Ensino

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## Introduction

Bakhtin's class notes, "Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar", translated to English in 2004, illustrate an aspect of his theory focused on its practical application in the classroom. According to its opening paragraph, it is not possible to study grammar without considering its stylistic meaning: "When grammar is isolated from the semantic and stylistic aspects of speech, it inevitably turns into scholasticism" (BAKHTIN, 2004, p.2). Since the concept of style is not only linked to the subject but also to the reader, therefore bound by the social environment of its audience (BAKHTIN, 1986), the teaching of grammar must be linked to its practical aspects, that is, the language in use. Considering his stand point, this article proposes to observe how the use of punctuation — limited as it is by its set of strict rules — fulfills the role of building meaning as well as stylistic effects, so contributing to the author's literary projects.

Regarding this aspect, Clarice Lispector plays an important role because she turns punctuation into an artifice of meaning, many times transgressing the norm or using it recurrently. So, by analyzing punctuation and, consequently, her writing style in *A hora da estrela* (1984), we aim to capture the language relations adopted by the author as well as her artistic proposition and thus establishing how far it contributes to the emotional/evaluative aspects of that work.

Since her first novel, *Perto do coração selvagem*, her use of punctuation has been creating unexpected meaning nuances by fragmenting language and eliding parts of it, so that the author can create a prose rhythm charged with poetic aspects. However, such rhythm is closely linked to her artistic project in a broader sense. In *A hora da estrela* (*The hour of the star*, 1984), her use of punctuation is part of Rodrigo's — the narrator — project, and in a higher instance, the author's herself. The first person narrator follows Macabea's path — a woman from the North-east of Brazil, who comes to Rio de Janeiro to fulfill her dream of becoming an actress. But the narrator is so close to the character that he uses every language artifice to profile her essence. One of the resources he uses to accomplish his project is to follow the rhythm, the vital drive of the narrative, which is so near to orality, when he states:

For as I explained, the word is my instrument and must resemble the word. Or am I not a writer? More actor than writer, for with only one system of punctuation at my disposal, I juggle with intonation and force another's breathing to accompany my text (LISPECTOR, 1992, p.22-23).

In this brief excerpt, we see that punctuation is purposefully thought as part of the narrator's oral expression and not only a way of organizing the clause logically. It is, therefore, associated with one of the primordial aspects of punctuation regarding prosody (ROCHA, 1998), which still guides some informal texts, as found in literary and advertisements. So, by following Bakhtin's proposal (2004, p.1) on how to treat Grammar in teaching, this article intends to point out the different uses of language, especially those related to punctuation, and their effects on meaning.

At first, we will discuss Bakhtin's dialogical theory of language and his pedagogical proposal (2004), as presented in his notes, trying to apply his comments about teaching of syntax and sentence structure but more related to punctuation marks. Although punctuation is not precisely the focus of his notes, we believe that there is an indirect link between each other.

Later on, we will verify Clarice Lispector's proposition stated in the opening pages of her book and see how it is developed throughout the novel. It will be followed by an analysis of some relevant excerpts, where the recurrent use of brackets, dashes and colons is decisive to the building of the text's rhythmic intonation and to the meaning effects according to the author's project. Finally, we will discuss the result of that analysis, its contribution to Language Studies and its application to language teaching.

## **1 Dialogical theory of language**

The concept of the intrinsic duplicity of language that is central to Bakhtin and the Circle's theories presents many possibilities to understand the relationship self/other that are manifested in the theoretical categories conceptualized by the Circle, such as utterance, concrete utterance, dialogism, discursive genres, among others. The self made up by the other is represented by the social language, by the immediate addressee and a *superaddressee*. At the same time, the self reacts to the other in a subjective, personal,

and responsive manner and creates an utterance field that is simultaneously the same and the other.

In that sense, utterances can be the same but they never repeat, due to the historical circumstances and to the addressee that they are communicating. Therefore — as Bakhtin states in one of his main essays “Speech Genres” (1986) —, the utterer is in syntony with the historical moment of his utterance, awaiting the addressee’s response. However, that central concept is spread all over Bakhtin and the Circle’s reflections, like in the paper signed by Vološinov “Discourse in life and discourse in art – concerning sociological poetics”, published in 1926, or in “Author and the Hero in Aesthetic Activity” (1990), written in the 20’s, or in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (VOLOŠINOV), dated 1929. It is the same in all other texts in which Bakhtin discusses the works of Dostoevsky and Rabelais, extracting analytical categories from them, not only related to literary language, but to language in general.

When he reflects on the material importance in the literary work, in an essay published in 1924, titled “The problem of the content, material and form in verbal art”, the author discusses important aspects present in the texture of a work of art. From an aesthetic standing point, the artist’s work has as its ultimate goal to overcome the word itself: “the artist overcomes language thanks to the nature of the linguistic instrument itself and, by linguistically enhancing it, makes language overcome itself” (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.297). For this linguist philosopher, the author molds its material in a way that it fits his artistic purposes by using the resources offered by the language, commonly breaking the accepted standards:

The aesthetics of verbal art must not skip over linguistic language either, but must utilize all the work of linguistic to understand, on the one hand, the technique of the poet’s creation on the basis of a correct understanding of the place of material in artistic creation, and, on the other hand, the distinctiveness of the aesthetic object. (p.297)

For the author, the organization of the linguistic material in the process to make real a work of art is fundamental because the organization of phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs creates the hero’s universe — its environment, its behavior, that is “the set of life’s ethical events, aesthetically formulated and finished” (p.297).

One of the most complex concepts that is also associated to the self/other duplicity is related to architectonics:

The process of realizing the aesthetic object, or in other words, of realizing the artistic task in its essence, is a process of consistently transforming a linguistically and compositionally conceived verbal whole into the architectonic whole of an aesthetically consummated event. At the same time, of course, all the verbal connections and interrelations of a linguistic and compositional order are transformed in extraverbal architectonic event-related interconnections. (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.297)

By the author's words, we intend that the work with the material, its organization in text is critical to accomplish the utterer purpose of utterance. Although Bakhtin had mainly the literary text in mind when he wrote that essay, such considerations might be very well applied to many other types of utterances.

When he discusses the issues of the content and the material in artistic work, the author expresses his point of view on the artist's ability to overcome the boundaries imposed by his artistic project:

As we have pointed out, the aesthetic object, as the content and architectonics artistic vision, is a completely new ontic formation that is not of a natural-scientific order (nor of a psychological order, of course) and not of a linguistic order: it is a distinctive aesthetic existent, which arises on the boundaries of a work by way of overcoming its material—extra-aesthetic—determinateness as a thing (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.297)

Considering that the compositional form contributes to the realizing of an artistic project and that the project is expressed by language, discussing the stylistic procedures is a way of relating them to the artistic work in a broader sense. Since the issue that intrigues us is the punctuation marks — which are used in an unusual way and frequently against the norm in Lispector's work, we will discuss how much some forms of punctuation help in her artistic project. Never losing sight that Bakhtin conceives the dialogical aspects of language and also in the grammar used in literature as the ample realization of the resources offered by language, the study of the literary language might help in understanding the adequate utilization of linguistic resources and the effects that can be generated by their intentional use.

In his class notes, Bakhtin mentions a way of teaching Grammar by pointing out to the students the outcome of linguistic choices. For the author, who was also a teacher in Saransk, one of the negative aspects of teaching was the reproduction of models without exploiting other possibilities of text formation as well as the effects that could be extracted from the linguistic resources. The structural model repeated almost mechanically was the formation of long, subordinate clauses, guided by the logical/cohesive construction. His pedagogical proposal consisted in showing those effects in short sentences — necessary for speeding up communication — in opposition to long ones, full of subordinate clauses. One must bear in mind that at that time the new means of communication were beginning to spread their influence and needed brevity and synthesis. It is also necessary to remind the revolutionary movement of Russian poetry, led by Mayakovsky, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From an aesthetic point of view, the proposal was to break away from the poetic models of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and impose an impacting language much closer to orality.

Within that context, we see that Bakhtin's proposal is closely linked to his theoretical reflections, which spring from observing language and its utterances in their living reality. According to the author, one cannot separate the teaching of grammar from its stylistic meaning (BAKHTIN, 2004, p.12). In his notes, Bakhtin refers to the state of teaching in Russia in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even considering the temporal and geographical distance, his comments and suggestions are still very much applicable to the education in Brazil nowadays, despite all the efforts towards the teacher training and the updating of teaching materials in our country.

From this theoretical perspective, the purpose of this article is to observe, in *A hora da estrela*, the effects elicited by the recurrent use of some punctuation marks — such as brackets, dashes, and colons — creating meaningful effects that come to aid in the author's project.

## **2 *The hour of the star: an innovative project***

*The hour of the star* is one of Lispector's last works, published in 1977, the year of her death. The novel's subject matter moves away from the author's previous themes because it deals with a character that migrates from the North-east to the big city of Rio

de Janeiro in pursuit of her dream of becoming an actress. The story is told by Rodrigo, a narrator/character that mixes the tale of Macabéa with his own life throughout his narration. Right in the beginning one notices the intricacy of those mixed voices — the narrator's, the character's, and even the author's. Such complexity is announced in the book's introduction — “The Author's Dedication (alias Clarice Lispector)” — and in her listing of 13 alternative titles to the original one. The preamble is reverently written as it refers to classical and contemporary music composers — Schumann, Beethoven, Bach, Chopin, Stravinsky, Strauss, Debussy, Nobre, Prokofiev, Orff, Schönberg, from dodecaphonic to electronic ones, establishing a dialogue with the book, as the musical sounds are constantly mentioned in the narration.

Such initial reference is not inconsequential, though. It clearly announces the author's intention of bringing both languages — the musical and the literary — close together. For example, she always uses some musical reference as background: “[...] I break out into a strident, high-pitched, syncopated melody. It's the sound of my own pain, of someone who carries this world where there is so little happiness.” (LISPECTOR, 1992, p.12); “The action of this story will result in my transfiguration into someone else and in my ultimate materialization into an object. Perhaps I might even acquire the sweet tones of the flute and become entwined in a creeper vine” (LISPECTOR, 1992, p.20)<sup>1</sup>.

The composers she mentions belong to a long musical tradition, from the classical (Bach) to the romantic (Schumann, Strauss, Chopin, Debussy) to the modern (Schönberg) and the contemporary (dodecaphonic and electronic). As we can see, the musical variety works as the soundtrack of the written scene. The various background rhythms and sounds are part of the mismatched accounts of the simple and unpolished Macabea and the narrator, with all his complex intellect and his search for answers to his existential problems, but who longs for achieving the migrant's uncultivated simplicity. The dialogue between narrator and character reveals an underlying discord and a lack of tuning: “Why should I write about a girl whose poverty is so evident? Perhaps because within her there is seclusion. Also because in her poverty of body and soul one touches sanctity ...” (p.20-21).

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<sup>1</sup> From this reference on, it will be shown only the page number, since it refers to the same publication, *The hour of the star* (1992), a translation from Clarice Lispector's original work by Giovanni Pontiero.

However, there are approaching movements, of identification between Macabea's reality and the narrator Rodrigo. In the beginning, the identification is perceived in the insignificance, in the lack of emotional bonds: "But the person whom I am about to describe...whom nobody needs. It strikes me that I don't need her either and that what I'm writing could be written by another."(p.14)," (When I consider that I might have been born her - and why not? — I shudder. The fact that I am not her strikes me as being a cowardly escape. I feel remorse, as I explained in one of my titles for this book.)"(p.38).

The reference to musical sounds supports the narrated facts in a way that it serves as a musical soundtrack for the desired tone effects in the reader's mind: "The facts are sonorous but among the facts there is a murmuring. It is the murmuring that frightens me "(p.24),"This story has no melody that could be rightly termed *cantabile*. Its rhythm is frequently discordant "(p.16). Some excerpts illustrate that relationship:

The words are sounds transfused with shadows that intersect unevenly, stalactites, woven lace, transposed organ music. I can scarcely invoke the words to describe this pattern, vibrant and rich, morbid and obscure its counterpoint the deep bass of sorrow. *Allegro con brio* (p.16).

For at the hour of death you become a celebrated film star, it is a moment of glory for everyone, when the coral music scales the top notes (p.28).

(What's happening? It's as if I were listening to a lively tune being played on the piano —a sign perhaps that the girl will have a brilliant future? I am consoled by this possibility and will do everything in my power to make it come to pass.)(p.29).

The story will also be accompanied through-out by the plangent tones of a violin played by a musician in the street corner (p.23).

The image of the violin player reappears in Macabéa's death scene, establishing the bridges between life and death, the beginning and the end of the story.

A scrawny fellow appeared on the street-corner, wearing a threadbare jacket and playing the fiddle. [...] It is only now that I have come to understand. Only now has the secret meaning dawned on me: the fiddler's music is an omen. I know that when I die I shall hear him playing and that I shall crave for music, music, music (p. 81-82).



Besides musical sounds, though, there are also other types of chant being mentioned, such as nursery rhymes and the singing of birds: The cockerel's crowing in the blood-red dawn gave a new meaning to her withered existence." (p.30); "Sometimes the girl remembered the disturbing words of a French ballad. She had heard it sung out of tune by a group of young girls who danced in a circle, joining hands ... 'Give me one of your daughters ... marre-marre-deci.' 'I chose you daughter ... maré- marre.' (p.32). Those references are associated with a type of written language that follows a diversified rhythm — either marked by sudden interruptions or by phrase extensions that sounds discontinuously, as a consequence of the narrator's changes of tone throughout the story.

### **3 Punctuation marks: rhythm, style, and the aesthetic project**

From a grammar viewpoint, punctuation marks fulfill a specific role in the structuring of sentences and few are the grammarians that talk of punctuation as an expression of orality, as it was in old manuscripts until its standardization by syntax. Many of the problems related to punctuation spring from the fact that the establishing of the norm is fairly recent, not only by the relationship between speech and writing and the difficulties of transposition of oral language intonations into writing, but also by historical reasons, as we see in Rocha (2007a). For Catach (1994, p. 48-49), punctuation must be apprehended on text level, which is a set of phrases that form a “total unity of meaning”. Authier-Revuz (1990) also brings an important contribution to the discussion with her reflection on the topic under a discursive perspective, supported by Bakhtin's dialogical theory (1986). She introduces a differentiated way of seeing punctuation, by presenting it as a set of signs so that the voices that cross each other in the various social circumstances can be expressed in the materiality of the text. The texture of those voices is marked by signals that register the struggle and the tension emerged from heterogeneity — an aspect previously hinted by Bakhtin and deepened by Authier-Revuz in her observations.

In the literary text, punctuation obeys the author's utterance project, therefore, harnessed to its origins or associated with the sentence's syntactic structure. Besides that ambivalent relationship between syntax and orality, punctuation marks can also

orientate, from a discursive perspective, the alternation of voices in the discourse, as proposed by Authier-Revuz (1998) and reinforced by Chacon (1998, p.113): “[...] by producing an interruption in the discourse flow, marked in writing by punctuation marks, those reflexive structures bring to the discourse the reminder of its heterogeneity”.

In the case of Clarice Lispector’s novel, we can observe that punctuation is used in a really diversified manner, if we take into account what is established by the norm. Along with normative use, punctuation helps in the making of the narration’s rhythm — as stated in the introduction and mentioned throughout the text — as well as a way of branding the different voices that are heard: the narrator’s, the author’s, and the character’s, which is a position even above the author’s.

The proposal is to maintain a dialogue with the reader, so the sentences come expressively punctuated with exclamation and interrogation marks (DAHLET, 2006, p.192), as we can see below:

(How can I avenge myself? Or, rather, how can I get satisfaction? I’ve found the answer: by loving my dog that consumes more food than she does. Why does she not fight back? Has she no pluck ? No, she is sweet and docile.) (p.25-26).

But don’t grieve for the dead: they know what they’re doing. I have been to the land of the dead and after the most gruesome horrors I have come back redeemed. I am innocent! Do not devour me! I am not negotiable! (p.85).

Along with those punctuation marks, we have brackets, dashes, and colons. According to Dahlet (2006, p.190-191), these are signals that can be interchangeable, as in the case of double dashes, which can be used in substitution of brackets, and the simple dash, which can replace a colon. However, in the case of Lispector’s text, the mere substitution wouldn’t be appropriate, as the three forms of punctuation appear in the same sentence. The emphatic recurrence of those marks helps in the creation of an irregular rhythm, which alternates according to the event that is being described. The systematic use of dashes and brackets clog the narrative flow and introduces a different voice, which is sometimes the narrator’s own reflexive voice. In this case, we can observe a change in tone, as we can see in the fragment above:

Even though all she possessed within was that tiny essential flame: the breath of life. (I am having a hellish time with this story. May the Gods never decree that I should write about a leper, for then I should become covered in leprosy.) (I am delaying the events that I can vaguely foresee, simply because I need to make several portraits of this girl from Alagoas. Also because if anyone should read this story I'd like them to absorb this young woman like a cloth soaked in water. The girl embodies a truth I was anxious to avoid. I don't know whom I can blame, but someone is to blame) (p.38-39).

In that long paragraph, divided in two blocks between brackets, we hear two voices: one turned to the sensation that mobilizes the narrator, and the other, which is related to the building of the narration. They make up a sort of dialogue between the narrator and the possible speculations of an assumed reader, as if they were the answers to the procedures adopted throughout the narration. The brackets interrupt the narrative's flow and introduce a new tone. According to Authier-Revuz (1998), brackets can introduce an interdiscursive and intertextual dialogue to the subject's own utterance. The French researcher studies the glosses that permeate utterances, having as a reference the Bakhtinian concept of the intrinsic duplicity of language. However, she goes beyond Bakhtin's theory by looking for the Unconscious Other in those reflexive discourses.

The non-coincidence of the discourse with itself is presented as constitutive, based on Bakhtin's dialogism, considering that, because it is produced in the "realm of the already-said of the other discourses, it is inhabited by the discourse of the other — and the theorizing of the interdiscourse, in the discourse analysis, links the "I-speak" here and now to the "something that is said somewhere else, before and independently" (M. Pêcheux), and hits, on the subject level, what M. Scheinader calls "the fundamental non-property of language" (AUTHIER-REVUZ, 1998, p.22).

From the French Discourse Analysis (FDA) perspective, Authier-Revuz stresses the interdiscursivity and the non-coincidence of that kind of discourse, since there is the insurgence of the Other in that discourse (according to Lacan's psychoanalytical theory). From the dialogical viewpoint here adopted, it is interesting to observe how the researcher establishes the presence of a second voice in the background of the discursive thread. Here, returning to Bakhtin's ideas, it is important to observe the non-coincidence as the unfolding of the self's and the other's language, which, in the case of

the literary text, it is the narrator's, who is transformed in the subject of his own utterance.

In spite of not systematically registering the glosses, the brackets in that instance mark two uttering voices: one, of the narrator who is responsible for the narrative ordering of facts and the other, of the narrator who reacts to his own discourse, by either commenting on sensations or by addressing possible speculations from the reader. The result is a differentiated rhythm, as seen in contrapuntal compositions.

Besides that function, the brackets are also employed to signal an auditory sensation in significant emotional moments. The word “bang” put between brackets creates a visual-auditory sensation by simulating the effect of a bomb. The following excerpts, taken from the beginning and the end of the narrative — although they can be seen throughout the entire text — illustrate how the writer mimics the sounds of drums announced in the beginning of the novel:

Now (bang) with a few rapid strokes I shall delineate the girl's previous history up to the moment when she stood before the mirror in the lavatory (p.27).

At this point (bang), the affair between Olímpico and Macabéa came to an abrupt end. It had been a curious affair yet was somehow akin to the paler shades of love. Olímpico bluntly informed her that he had met another girl and that the other girl in question was Glória (bang) (p.60).

Some days later, when she received her wages, she summoned enough courage for the first time in her life (bang) to make an appointment with a doctor recommended by Glória, who didn't charge much (p.66).

Macabéa began (bang) to tremble ... (p.77)

This as well? (bang) Macabéa's heart, thumped furiously at the thought of seeing her hair grow (p.78).

The moment she stepped off the pavement. Destiny (bang) swift and greedy, whispered: fast: now, quickly, for my hour has come! (p.79).

Just as the brackets, the excessive use of dashes marks a break in the narrative in order to insert a comment, an explanation, or an additional piece of information, as the passage below illustrates:

Will this story become my own coagulation one day? Who can tell? If there is any truth in it — and clearly the story is true even though

invented —let everyone see it reflected in himself for we are all one and the same person, and he who is not poor in terms of money is poor in spirit or feeling for he lacks something more precious than gold —for there are those who do not possess that essential essence (p.12).

In the paragraph above, we see the use of dashes to insert comments of various nature; first, to point out a paradoxical situation; second, to offer an explanation of what had been said before.

The insistence on using dashes and brackets that interrupt the story is also related to the use of colons, which in turn breaks with the narrative sequence as well so that an explanation, a comment, or some other piece of information can be inserted.

Another portrait, she had never received gifts from anyone. It didn't worry her for she needed so little. One day, however, she saw something that, for one brief moment, she dearly wanted: it was a book that Senhor Raimundo, who was fond of literature, had left on the table. The book was entitled *The Shamed and Oppressed* (p. 40).

In the same paragraph, we find three different forms of punctuation, which create a segmented reading rhythm.

As I've already said the girl from the North-east did not believe in death. She couldn't believe in death - after all— was she not alive? She had long since forgotten the names of her father and mother, for her aunt had never mentioned them. (I am exploiting the written word with the utmost ease. This alarms me, for I am afraid of losing my sense of order and of plunging into an abyss resounding with cries and shrieks: the Hell of human freedom. But I shall continue.) (p.36).

The narrative sequence, as seen in the example above, is constantly broken within the sentences by the secondary punctuation so as to create an irregular reading pace or, as the narrator describes it, an offbeat rhythm: sometimes faster, sometimes slower, more or less dramatic, as if emulating the musical beat of the composers revered in the introduction. As a result, the use of punctuation goes beyond the norm and becomes linked to orality itself, playing an important part in the narrative's sound perception.

Besides that secondary effect, punctuation also marks the intervention of a subject who, by distancing himself from the facts he is telling, interprets the events as

they are being unfolded and establishes possible relationships between his identity as subject/narrator and the character he is creating. The sentence between brackets makes the discourse turn to itself in a meta-utterance process, as described by Authier-Revuz (1998). In that case it is not the voice of the Other — the unconscious voice that emerges from within the discourse's thread —, but it is the narrator's literary interventionist strategy as a subject of his own discourse. Therefore, the signals mentioned above punctuate that intervention, representing a change in the narrative course. As Chacon (1998, p.132) observes:

The use the subject makes of punctuation marks adjusts and characterizes, in the graphic production, the enunciating activity, for it demarcates the action among the interlocutors when it is set within the realm of writing. And it is precisely because of the adjustment that those marks make on the graphic level that we are allowed to highlight the *rhythmic* character of punctuation.

#### **4 The narrative thread: the interdiscourse between the self and the other**

The punctuation marks discussed in this paper — brackets, dashes, and colons — are not just logical-syntactical resources to be used in the structuring of sentences. They are visual markers that stop the story flow in order to allow comments that are somehow alien to the narrative thread, thereby creating a suggestive rhythmic cadence and, consequently, going beyond the mere application of the norm.

As the norm says, those signals introduce secondary information to the text. According to Bechara (2005, p.611-612), colons introduce enumeration, highlight expressions with special intonation that suggest explanation, cause, or consequence; the dashes are used to mark insertions or to denote a stronger pause; and the brackets mark a more complete syntactic and/or semantic isolation within the enunciation besides placing writer and reader closer to each other.

However, as we have stated in the analysis of the novel's excerpts, besides introducing a parallel comment, the punctuation is also a part of a meta-utterance process that concerns the subject/narrator's life experience and, consequently, it is like a second voice that expresses itself in a different tone. In addition, the exhaustive recurrence of such signals creates a rhythmic effect that is associated with the events

narrated. It serves as a visual as well as an expressive resource that interrupts the narration's *continuum*, creating a sort of musical counterpoint.

Thus, the punctuation marks help in the perception of the rhythm mentioned above, from the very beginning until the end of the text, intentionally used as a musical accompaniment to the events as they unfold throughout the narrative. The rhythm that sets the pace of the events varies according to the emotional intensity in which the facts are told by the narrator.

Sometimes, there's the longing of the romantic beat — as in “Una Furtiva Lacrima”: “(...) had been the only really beautiful thing in Macabéa's life. Drying her tears, she tried to sing what she had heard. But Macabéa's voice was as rough and tuneless as the rest of her body”(p.50). Even the trilling sounds that mark the narrator's piercing existential agony are in tune with the character's suffering. The verbally described noises echo a fragmented and choppy rhythm that is explicated by the author's particular use of punctuation.

So, the punctuation marks mentioned above not only surpass their normative role as mere logical-syntactic resources used in the structuring of sentences, but they are an intrinsic part of Clarice Lispector's ethical and aesthetical project — in this novel as in many other ones. Therefore, on a side note, it is understandable her indignation when compelled to edit the original punctuation of her texts, as seen in her answer to a French editor who demanded that punctuation in *Perto do coração selvagem* be corrected (MOSER, 2000, p.306).

## **Conclusion**

As Bakhtin proposes in his class notes (2004), the teaching of syntax could be done by contrasting the complex forms of writing with the simpler structures found in orality — most commonly seen in literary and journalistic texts. If we take heed of the philosopher's suggestions, it is possible to think of his pedagogical application using literary texts for the teaching of punctuation. One of the suggestions found in his notes is that we work with the multiplicity of options that the language offers, by contrasting them and observing how effects are produced in each instance/form applied to the text.

As a theoretician and teacher, Bakhtin analyses a series of syntactic structures with the objective of demonstrating that to each utterance there is a type of construction. He also highlights the richness of style found in the literary texts used as object of the language study. Thus, the analysis of punctuation in literary texts should allow to observe the effects of meaning that punctuation can elicit — as in this work of Clarice Lispector .

One alternative would be to discuss the use of punctuation marks and its effects in an original text, in view of another utterance proposal from another type of text production and circulation, directed to a possible reader. That would be a way to show a productive use of the punctuation instead of resorting to mere abstract memorization.

Another possibility would be to suggest the substitution of the punctuation marks in original texts by cohesive terms that would permit the sentence to flow more easily. That type of exercise could get students to perceive the differences in terms of how it is possible to create meaning just by using punctuation in different ways.

According to Rocha (2007b), supporting Bakhtin's ideas, the best examples of punctuation styles are found in literary and journalistic texts. He also discusses the possibility of the absence of punctuation as an authorial strategy that creates special effects by freeing writing from speech. In this way, by contrast, as suggested by Bakhtin (2004), it would be possible to offer a range of alternatives for the application of those signals. So it is possible to get more consistent enunciative propositions — in order to escape the trap of memorizing abstract rules, often decontextualized from concrete utterances, as we see in exercises based on excerpts taken out of their production and circulation contexts.

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