

# **Language and Social Behavior a New Look At (In) Discipline in School**

**Hadinei Ribeiro Batista**

## **ABSTRACT**

The present work is a preliminary discussion on cognitive syntax and social behavior. From the analysis of textual productions of students of basic education in a public school that serves low-income students, two different cognitive systems were identified among groups of apprentices with varied socioeconomic profile. These systems were monitored by observing students' daily routines in order to diagnose the extent to which the cognitive system relates to the conduct of young people in their interpersonal relationships. It has been found that student behavior is, in general, the result of cognitive traits (or cognitive syntax) built from their experiences. Such findings made it possible to start this debate on reflections within the scope of (in) discipline or the conviviality of students in school.

**Keywords:** (In)discipline, Cognitive syntax, Social behavior, bullying; education.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many are the authors who are dedicated to reflect the indiscipline of the contemporary School. Parrat-Dayana (2008), specialist in the field, "unveils the causes and indicates remedies to prevent and cure indiscipline". According to the author, indiscipline is a symptom that the school system has not been aligned with the current society. Bullying, as a way of eliminating the subject, is not a solution, on the contrary, it contributes to greater disorder in the classes. "(...) It is necessary to develop a cooperative logic between children when they are together and between children and adults" (page 136). Listening is the first step since it consists of an act of respect and tolerance that allows for democratic debate. Careful work based on Piagetian foundations can be a starting point, since it presupposes the construction of knowledge by looking at the student as the subject of his learning.

Le Mauricien (2016) explains that indiscipline among students in school has increased both in terms of frequency and severity. According to the author it is due to minor

misbehavior like lateness, improper dressing and not complete homework to severe misconduct mainly violence against teachers and peers, bullying and drugs. Most of these problems results from lack of interest for learning.

Silva (1998) states that the discipline in schools is not always treated under a direct and explicit form of approach, but normally in vicarious way. For the author, this theme is part of different areas of knowledge which becomes hard its location due to this dispersion. Lots of research in Brazil has treated about indiscipline, especially on the theme about violence (Sposito, 1998; Brancaleoni, A. et al, 2001; Macedo, R. et al, 2009; Brito, et al, 2010; Cunha, 2014). There are others specifically about bullying (Tognetta, L. et al, 2010; Ens, R. et al, 2013). The majority of investigations have taken place from disciplinary occurrences registered by the institution. We did not find a bias that attempted to understand the violent behavior of the adolescent from his linguistic production, which is the core of this text.

This study turns to the school context, more precisely to the situations of violence that

affect students of schools that serve low-income students living in communities of high social vulnerability. The focus is to initiate a debate about how language can offer important clues to the social action of these subjects, allowing a more accurate understanding of human cognition and effective pedagogical interventions to offer these students a better understanding of their social behavior through the proposition of cognitive alternatives capable of fostering a more harmonious relationship with the internal and external community.

From the texts produced by students of the fifth year on the subject of bullying, it was identified that the social variable 'bolsa família' (family bag)<sup>i</sup> revealed a cognitive syntax that shows the experience that the apprentices in thesis has with this act of violence in a peripheral public school. Such syntax was compared to the social behavior of the subjects, indicating that it tends to act according to the cognitive syntax that guides them. In addition to this observation, a plan of pedagogical intervention was made in which it was sought to make explicit for the subject the syntax that impacts their social relations and the finds were interesting.

## **LANGUAGE, COGNITION AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR**

According to Fauconnier (1997), language, understood as a means to 'photograph' our way of thinking, acting and communicating, functions as an indirect resource to reveal our social experiences or our daily experiences. Our thinking, in general, is constructed from complex mental operations, motivated by the inputs and outputs arising from our interaction with the world, with the other, with the social 'tissue' in which we are immersed. Thus, recognizing language as a prominent manifestation of our thinking, it is, in some way, a gateway to our social conduct, our way of acting socially. In this text, it is fundamentally sought to show this more direct relationship between language and social behavior through what we call cognitive syntax.

Butt et al (1998) explains that functional grammar should be understood as a series of

resources to describe, interpret, make and mean culture. Halliday (1994), when dealing with functional systemic grammar, presents different functions of language or metafunctions. One is ideational, in which language is used as a form of representation of the world or human experience. The author argues that transitivity can function as a 'photograph' of a particular scene. For example, in the statement "The man in a white shirt is sitting in the chair next to that lady in red," the language was used to describe an event in the world, it served as a way of representing a state of affairs in the world.

Transitivity refers to the fact that there is a 'certain' man sitting in a specific place. The language here served as a faithful description of the scene, as is usually done with a photograph. Although the representation verified in the statement is for a static scene, there are transitive constructions that relate to our way of acting socially. In a structure such as "I pushed the couch to the right," transitivity is also a representation of an event in the world that underlies an action of a subject in the first person. What in this text is called cognitive syntax, in a way, meets Halliday's understanding of the transitivity system as a way of representing situations that occur in our daily life. The novelty is that the focus is on how one subject interacts with the other and participates in situations of violence in their daily lives. What is put in thesis is the possibility of accessing the human cognition from the language and to verify in what way this cognitive system guides the subject in its experiences of life.

## **HOW CAN LANGUAGE REVEAL OUR WAY TO ACT?**

For this experiment, we explore a set of texts collected by Sabere<sup>ii</sup> virtual platform. The texts covered the subject of bullying and were typed directly on the platform, which controls numerous social variables, among them 'family bag'. The texts were produced by students of a public school that serves low-income students living in a community of social vulnerability. We separated the texts into two groups (1) receive 'family bag' and (2) do not receive 'family bag'.

We totaled 54 texts, being 23 for (1) and 31 for (2). The statements below show two types of syntactic constructions found in the two groups.

#### **Receive Family bag**

1. Eu chamei xxxxx de mendigo.

I called Beggar xxxxx.

2. Já chamei a xxxx de doida varrida.

I already called the xxxx of crazy swept.

3. Chamei xxxx de viado e xxxxx de ET.

I called xxxx of gay and xxxxx of unworldly.

4. Já chamei xxxx de mc bilanden. (Bin Laden)

I have already called xxxx of mc bilanden.

5. Um dia eu o chamei de queloide e de ipopotamo.  
(hipopótamo)

One day I called him keloid and hippo.

6. Já chamei xxxx de pilhoenta. (piolhenta)

I already called xxxx of lice

7. Um dia dois meninos me chamaram de ti beisa e narigudo.

One day two boys called me a beiget and big nose.

From these statements, two distinct cognitive systems or two cognitive syntaxes were identified. For the students who declared receiving a scholarship, we noted the cognitive syntax: offender - victim. Note that in all statements in group (1) there is a subject who acts with aggression and an offended subject. These subjects actively participate in the act of violence. For group 2, there is a different cognitive system whose syntax points to an experience with bullying in which the subject acts neither as an offender nor as a victim, but as a spectator of this form of violence.

In the work done in school, whose objective was to monitor the social behavior of these actors, it was possible to verify that the students of the group (1), whenever involved in situations of conflict, assumed themselves as offenders when they moved to the position of

These statements were the most frequent according to the survey done through the Antcon system<sup>iii</sup>.

#### **Do not receive Family bag**

1. era um dia no meu apartamento eu ia brincar com meus amigos e ai veio um menino e chamou meu amigo de pirata.

it was a day in my apartment I was going to play with my friends and there came a boy and called my friend pirate.

2. Um certo dia essa amiga minha foi suada de 4 olhos.

One day, this friend of mine was sweaty with 4 eyes.

3. Eu já presenciei os alunos do 9º ano e do 8ºano chamar os alunos menores de tampinha.

I have already seen the students in the 9th and 8th grade call the smaller students of cap.

4. Eu ja presenciei o bulling verbal na rua uma mulher na rua foi compra pão só que ela ia trabalha e ela era gordinha ou seja cheinha,ai ela estava com presa ai ela perguntou se ia demora o pão ai o padeiro começou a chingar(...)

I already witnessed the verbal bullying in the street a woman in the street went buying bread only that she was going to work and she was chubby or fat, then she was in a hurry then she asked if the bread would take time to get ready the baker started to scold her ...)

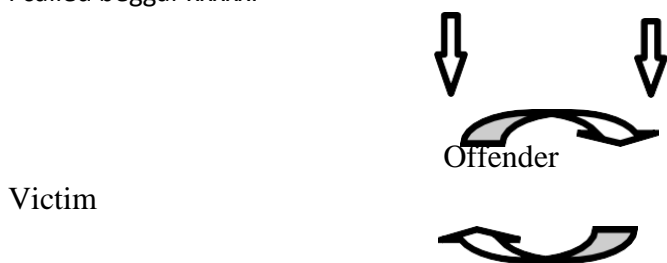
5. Eu nunca sofri bullying na escola mas tem pessoas que sofreram bullying na escola.

I have never suffered bullying at school but there are people who have been bullied at school.

subject, fueling an offender-victim cycle that, depending on the situation, continued to the point of physical aggression. The occurrences recorded in the pedagogical coordination about these students confirmed this diagnosis. Thus, in a situation where the teacher cursed for some reason one of these students, the student retaliated and, if the teacher continues with the cursing, the cycle gains strength, once the student, assuming the position of subject, always offends or otherwise harms his teacher. Because, in the position of subject, the student puts himself in the right to displease any teacher, and the teacher, in turn, must limit himself in relation to the offenses, the cycle saturates and the case is sent to the coordination. Whenever the intervention reproduced the cycle initiated by the teacher, the student assumed again as an offender and, when the cycle was saturated, the flow continued in the

school management and so on. This shows that the syntax present in the cognitive of the child for situations of violence in the group (1), that is, victim-offender, mirrored the social conduct of this subject. By logic, whenever victimized, offended. This mechanism was not verified, with the same frequency and the same content, for students in the group (2). The interesting thing is that this behavior is generalized, regardless of whether the cycle is with the teacher, with a colleague, with the pedagogical coordination staff, school management or even with the military intervention, in cases of infraction. This cycle can be schematized as follows:

(a) Eu chamei xxxxx de mendigo.  
I called beggar xxxxx.



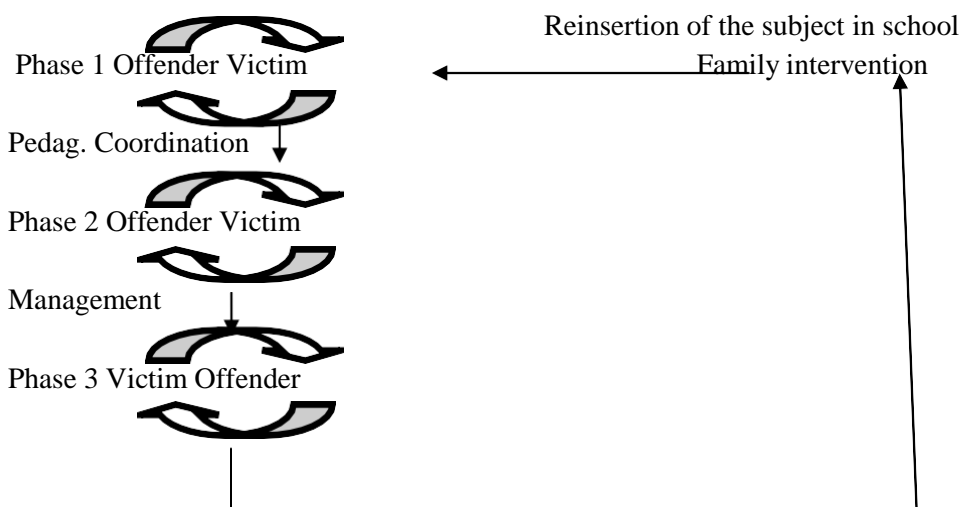
Victim

### PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION BASED ON COGNITIVE SYNTAX

After diagnosing that the subjects in group (1) presented the offender-victim cycle in the cognitive system and reproduced this system in their actions / experiences of conflicts in the school context, an intervention process was

proposed that could lead the child to reflect on their behavior and to think of other cognitive syntaxes through which he could solve his problems in a more peaceful and harmonious way, without taking so much damage from offenses and even physical aggressions. For the cases of violence in which the student entered the victim-offender cycle, the proposal was to explain this cognitive syntax to the student, showing that he entered into a cycle of offenses that did not eliminate the cause of this situation. In the most diverse cases, other syntaxes were offered that did not prevent the student from moving to the subject position, but that he assumed it without being an offender, offering and discussing with the student a set of benefits that he could 'reap' when he chose this alternative. The intent here is not to shape the child's behavior or conduct according to what the institution's standards dictate or to match the student's action to standards idealized by the school. It was chosen through dialogue based on cognitive syntax to make the child reflect on his behavior, to think about new alternatives and to reinsert himself in the social life with other possibilities of acting with the other. In doing so, the student knows that choosing 'x' has negative consequences for others and / or for himself and that he has 'y' and or 'z' to eliminate the cause without causing further harm. This rationale can be thought in two different cycles for the purpose of illustrating the advantage of the process:

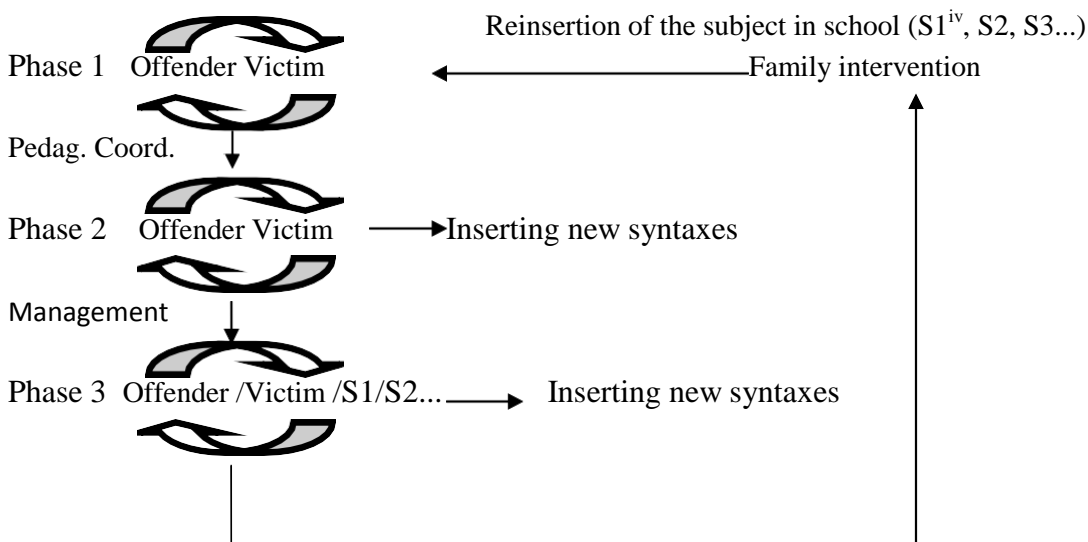
#### Scheme 1:



In scheme 1, we have a sequence of actions that starts with the conflict and undergoes a flow of interventions for its solution. In phase 1, the subjects started a conflict, which may be between teacher and student. After exchanges of 'offenses', the cycle was saturated and the case was referred to the coordination. In phase 2, it is assumed that the coordinator acted in a way that was understood as an aggressor by the student, starting a new cycle that, saturated, followed its flow towards the school management. The manager, being aggressive in order to prevent the action of the student, restarted the cycle that, once more saturated, followed its flow in order to request the intervention of the family so that the student does not take more as an offender. It is interesting in this cycle that at no stage was an attitude taken for the purpose of reconstructing the offender-victim

cognitive syntax. Note that in all phases there was only the reproduction of the cycle, which means that the student went through several instances and returned to school with the same and unique cognitive system. Among the attempts, there was only the imposition of 'fear' so that the student stopped moving to the position of subject, where he assumes the role of offender. If this occurs, even in the phase of family intervention, there may be psychic consequences for the student, since without being able to position himself as a subject, he tends to become more tormented or even anxious. In scheme 2 below, the cycle can be treated differently, with more complex cognitive operations through which the subject does not necessarily need to position himself as an offender.

**Scheme 2:**



In scheme 2, at each stage of the cycle, new cognitive syntaxes are inserted in which the student is offered new choices through which he can assume himself as subject without necessarily being an offender. In the dialogue with the student, a reassessment of his / her position as well as the teacher or a colleague is made so that the syntax he frequently employs in situations of conflict can be made explicit. Slowly, new systems are offered such as not to retaliate in these circumstances and seek to know with the help of another school professional why he was treated that way, because he understood that the teacher

or colleague was aggressive with him, his co-responsibility in the process and reflect on another way of resolving the conflict without insisting on the offender-victim's cognitive syntax, which logically brings a lot of damage to the student himself and to the other with whom he is in confrontation. In addition, there are cognitive syntaxes that the school regiment does not admit, including penalties. This is done in phase 2 and, in case of resistance or misunderstanding of the student, reworked in phase 3. Even if the student insists on the victim-offender cognitive system, he was given other alternatives for which he or she



Note that other conflicts can start at the same time. Another student with the same syntax can pick up a colleague's object and say that he does not return until he gives up the place and so on. From these conflicts, there may be physical assaults or more striking emotional offenses.

In the laboratory phase, a case was identified in which the student was conducted to the pedagogical coordination. The motive had been a fight with physical aggression. One student said that his colleague had called his mother fat. The other replied that he also had his mother offended. Asked about what had happened earlier, they said that one wanted to sit in the other's chair. When requesting further explanations, one of them delivered the cognitive syntax explained above. He reported that teacher 'y' did not charge for mapping and that his colleague wanted to sit in his place. This shows that both teacher and student need to reflect on their cognitive syntax in order to avoid conflicts arising from poorly planned cognitive systems. Several other syntaxes can be thought of from such as the use of student book, delays after the recreation, etc.

## CONCLUSIONS

The daily school life, in general, is permeated by conflicts of different natures. In a low-income school with a high level of social vulnerability, violence and conflicts are more frequent and even more offensive, with recurrent cases of physical aggression both among students and between teacher and student. Dealing with these situations has been a great challenge in the school context, since the coexistence between the subjects takes place in an arena in which they 'bubble' problems of all kinds, such as: abandoned child, with one-parent relationship, extreme poverty conditions, mistreatment, domestic violence, among others. Finding ways to contain these impulses and to focus on the teaching-learning process is one of the major challenges of the bodies that regulate the functioning of an educational institution. Often, the concern is to regulate the child's behavior, even under threats, without focusing on dialogue, reflection and the possibilities of expanding their cognitive syntax.

Many conflicts are generated by badly planned syntax by teachers or in interventions that reinsert the perpetrator with the same cognitive system in his / her working/learning environment, such as scheme 1. In a situation of violence in which the subject only receives threats, punishments and curses, the subject may be erased, that is, in preventing this subject from manifesting in any way, contributing to the formation of an even more tormented, frustrated or anxious individual. It is common to assign threats to prevent the subject from leaving the victim's position and to assume as an offender without working his cognitive so that he can move to that position with a different cognitive syntax that brings benefits and not harm. This is the bridge between the bad pedagogy and the pedagogy of fact. Choices that do not cause imbalance in the cognition of the learner so that he continues with new choices and reflections do not move the subject to other levels of learning and life experiences, the basic principle of a pedagogical system. This study contributes to new discussions about the relation between language, cognition and social behavior within what we call cognitive syntax as a way of thinking alternatives to deal with coexistence in the school context.

## REFERENCES

1. Brancaleoni, Ana P. L., Pinto, José M. R. (2001). *Um olhar sobre diferentes formas de enfrentar a violência escolar: uma abordagem etnográfica*. Cadernos de Educação, Pelotas, n. 16, p. 139-160, jan./jun.
2. Brito, Márcia S. T., Costa, Marcio da. (2010). *Práticas e percepções docentes e suas relações com o prestígio e clima escolar das escolas públicas do município do Rio de Janeiro*. Revista Brasileira de Educação, Rio de Janeiro, v. 15, n. 45, p. 500-501, set./dez. 2010.
3. Butt et al (1998). *Using functional grammar: an explorer's guide*. Sydney: Macquarie University.
4. Cunha, Marcela B. (2014). *Possíveis relações entre percepções de violência dos*

- alunos, clima escolar e eficácia coletiva.* Educação e Pesquisa, São Paulo, v. 40, n. 4, p. 1077-1092, out./dez.
5. Ens, Romilda T., Eyng, Ana M., GISI, Maria L. (2013). *Representações sociais sobre bullying no cotidiano de escolas públicas de educação básica.* Revista de Educação Pública, Cuiabá, v. 22 n. 50, p. 785-808, set./dez. 2013.
  6. Fauconnier, G. (1997). *Mappings in Thought and Language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  7. Halliday, M. A. K. *An introduction to functional grammar.* 2a ed. London: Edward Arnold.
  8. Macedo, Rosa M. A., Bomfim, Maria C. A. (2009). *Violências na escola.* Revista Diálogo Educacional, Curitiba, v. 9, n. 28, p. 605-618, set./dez.
  9. Parrat-Dayana, S. (2008). *Como enfrentar a indisciplina na escola.* São Paulo: Contexto.
  10. Le Mauricien, Dans. (2016). *Indiscipline in school.* Available at: <http://www.lemauricien.com/article/indiscipline-schools>. Accessed on April/2017.
  11. Silva, Luiz C. F. (1998). *Possíveis incompletudes e equívocos dos discursos sobre a questão da disciplina.* Educação & Sociedade, Campinas, v. 19, n. 62, p. 125-150.
  12. Sposito, Marília P. *A instituição escolar e a violência.* Cadernos de Pesquisa, São Paulo, n. 104, p. 58-75, jul. 1998.
  13. Tognetta, Luciene R. P., Vinha, Telma P. (2010). *Até quando? Bullying na escola que prega a inclusão social.* Educação, Santa Maria, v. 35, n. 3, p. 449-464, set./de

---

<sup>i</sup> Bolsa Família (family bag) is a direct income transfer program directed to families living in poverty and extreme poverty throughout the country, so that they can overcome the situation of vulnerability and poverty. The variable 'bolsa família' was initially chosen by the hypothesis that the greater the social vulnerability the greater the chance of the subject in experiencing constant conflicts, primarily verbal aggression relations.

<sup>ii</sup> The environment, made up of interaction rooms and spaces for production and textual review (Batista & Mollica, 2014), was constructed for the compilation of cybercorpora to attend specific experiments on the relation between language and social factors in this level of language grammar.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software.html>

<sup>iv</sup> S1, S2, S3... i.e, syntax 1, syntax 2, syntax 3.