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MULTIMODALITY AND BULLYING - A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Abstract

Given that "the intentional use, either effective or as a threat, of physical force or power, against oneself, another person, group or community, that might result, in all likelihood, in physical or emotional harm, death, development disorder or deprivation (HWO, 2002), frequently and systematically occurs in schools – aka bullying – and involves relationships of unequal power" (Seixas, 2009), we intend to understand how children act in this context, taking as variable their genderⁱⁱ (Scott, 1995).

Considering the importance of promoting programs of prevention and strategies to address school violence, we chose a sociolinguistic analysis – multimodality ((Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006) -, with the intention of encouraging children to use a "written" enhancer for a greater freedom regarding the expression of feelings.

The results of this study indicate a difference in attitudes between female and male children: i) the girls portrayed the types of bullying more than boys; ii) only girls portrayed the distress calls of the victim; iii) neither sex identified the females as potential aggressors; iv) regarding the relationship between the victim and the observer, the boys portrayed victims of both sexes, whereas the girls portrayed a higher percentage of people as victims of a male rather than a female aggressor v) all girls portrayed the observer at a low angle; vi) all boys portrayed the observer at a high angle.

Keywords: Gender, Bullying, Sociolinguistics, Multimodal Writing

i. This paper has the contribution of Andreia Crespo, Carla Bemhaja, Catarina Ferreira, Carolina Casaca, Joana Correia, Sara Silva, and Sónia Monteiro.

ii. Throughout the text we use both names - sex and gender, since our goal it isn't connected to the distinction in terminology. It is therefore natural that the reader find the two words.

Introduction

This study emerged from within the course unit Research Seminar in Education, included in the course plan of the Masters in Teaching 1st and 2nd cycles of Basic Education.

Given that bullying (Seixas, 2009) is recurrent in schools and that, generally speaking, there is just a single office of conflict management in each school at the headquarters of different school districts, we saw fit to conduct an investigation regarding gender (Scott, 1995), since the children behave differently given their gender, which can be observed empirically.

When talking to some of these children about observed episodes, we realized that they struggle to express their thoughts in words, either orally or in written form. Therefore, we chose to allow the children involved in this study (girls and boys) to express themselves through drawings (Kress & Van Lewn, 2006), having as a task the illustration of a story they wrote for the school newspaper on a conference regarding bullying.

In a first phase of this article, we will outline some theoretical considerations on the scope of sociolinguistics – multimodal writing – highlighting the design of visual grammar (Kress & Van Lewn, 2006). Afterwards we will present the methodological procedures in use, followed by analysis and data interpretation. The final remarks will focus on the implications of this study felt by teachers and assistants in the schools where it was developed.

Sociolinguistics – contribution to a multimodal representation about bullying

Sociolinguistics can be defined as a movement that goes against all traditional schools of linguistics, and cannot be considered either a trend or even a model, but rather as a set of theories that will establish the need to connect the linguist being with the social being. Thus, we can see sociolinguistics as a set of guidelines attached to a series of schools and independent researchers who seek to analyze the problems of language (Reynoso, 2007).

Regarding society, sociolinguistics sees it as a reflection of language which is based on the prevailing social and cultural structures having the organization of the world as its main function. We can recognize the socio-cultural and ideological aspects, as well as a system of values and vision of a given sociolinguistic and cultural community, by reconstructing the operation of various systems of meaning of a language from a socio-semiotic analysis.

Considering the social-semiotics, Pimenta (s.d.), based on Michael Halliday (1985, 1994), defines it as "the science responsible for the analysis of signs in society, whose main function is to study the exchange of messages, i.e., the communication within a social context; in this theory, the various forms of representation are called semiotic modes" (Pimenta, s.d.).

According to the same author, socio-semiotic focuses on the analysis of different discourses where the subjectivity of the same universe as a process of meaning and information process is examined. We seek to outline the description of narrative, discursive and semantic structures in the discourses as a reflection on the different languages presented.

The discourses have certain historical and geographical characteristics since the perception of a given socio-cultural community is always in the revision process. The semiotic systems embedded in the linguistic socio-cultural complex of a certain community only work if we ensure a mutual understanding of the subjects included in the communication process, responding to the communication needs. According to the semiotic analysis, before observing the discourse manifestations, narrative structure must be taken into account. Semiotics regards discourse structure as a field that consists of discourse configurations expressed in texts (producing inter-texts) beyond the specifics of a subject (Joly, 1996).

On certain contexts, namely literary works, the verbal text is associated with the visual setting and the need to place words and visual organization in a complex semiotic object. There are several ways to interpret not only the symbols, but also visual and oral forms of communication which are created by human beings, who consider both concepts to be extremely broad and diverse (Joly, 1996).

According to Kress e Van Leeuwen (2001), man for a long time gave preference to a type of discourse where verbal language, either written or spoken, was placed over other forms of interaction such as the image.

Nowadays, we live in a era of visual images, which leads many to predict the need of an educational system with more emphasis on communication and reception of visual messages, whose color, among other things, conveys information about the public they belong to. Therefore, the colors are one of the first elements of gender differentiation: the color pink is easily associated with girls and blue with boys. These colors are automatically identifiable of the sex of a baby, a label that accompanies children for the rest of their lives. As they grow, pink and yellow are more commonly used by girls and the so-called primary colors are mostly used by boys.

In this sense, the color is a great indicator of the child's gender, as Cunha (2007) states; through the colors we can assign meanings, which will give us some indicators of how the child acts. Other markers that deserve attention are the ways in which children organize space and use materials, as well as their respective representation (Cunha, 2007, p.3). This author considers that in the drawing of girls, the human figures are usually static, surrounded by closed lines, with flowers and light colors, and there is not too much concern with spatial representation. Regarding the boys' drawings, there is the representation of movement and the relationships between the human figures, detail in the clothing and accessories, the colors used are darker and there is a perception of depth in what concerns spatial representation (Cunha, 2007, p.4). Indeed, in the drawings which form the basis of this study, we noticed some of the markers mentioned herein and we will later give further details on this.

Regarding the drawings made by children Mèredieu (1997), quoted by Boel e Silva (s.d.), states that before the pre-school age children produce drawings which are more genuine, that is, drawings that do not reflect signs imposed by society to which the child belongs. This happens because the child has not yet been influenced by the teachers and schools. However, the family also plays a crucial role in the acquisition of these signs, since the children interact with the adults that are closer to them, absorbing experiences and reflecting them in their games and drawings.

Indeed, Borges e Salomão (2003), quoted by Boel e Silva (s.d.), consider that before children enroll at school, they learn values and have cultural experiences through their relationship with adults. Besides, Finco (2004), quoted by Boel e Silva (s.d.), adds the idea that, not only the relationship between children and adults will influence their behavior in the context of socialization, but also that toys are other enhancers of the transmission of meanings they will influence the attitudes of children.

Even so, it is not uncommon to observe that, in children's games, it is natural to see boys perform so-called women's duties and girls play with boys' toys. Perhaps for that reason, Ivone Richter (2002), quoted by Boel e Silva (s.d.), argues that there is "a concern to multiculturalize the teaching and promote the integration of the individual, regardless of the cultural and social differences, deficiencies or gender" (p.1), that is, make the children's experiences more similar, without the distinction of gender, in order to reduce discrepancies and avoid attributing stereotyped attitudes or behaviors. The question is whether promotion vs. integration does not constitute itself a gender differentiation.

Grammar of Visual Design and Multimodality

Social semiotics can be seen as a movement that deals with the inter-relationship between language and visual semiosis (Fairclough, 2001). Such movement sees visual language as having its own syntax in which all its elements produce a whole. The Visual Design Grammar emerged on this premise, and its mentors, Kress and Van Leeuwen, outline patterns for the observation of images. All the elements of the image are regarded as visual phrases similar to those of written language syntax. The quoted grammar was drawn from the studies of Michael A. K. Halliday (1994). Based on the same grammar, Kress e Van Leeuwen (2006), adapted it for image analysis and visual compositions. Therefore, this grammar brought important contributions to the field of linguistics since it enabled analysis and to obtain meanings involved in the production of images by their creators. The visual semiotics systems can be initially seen as just texts, however they assume a coherence and relevance that contemplates representational structures that relate to the ideational and interactive place that represents the interpersonal and compositional space that relate to the textual domain (Vicentini, S. & Carmo, C., 2010).

It is known that the first representations found in the communication between humans were made through images and that over time their methods of production, dissemination, interpretation and conservation have been a constant target of increasing technological development. The presence of media images and from many other different types of visual presentations is such that we can conclude that we live in a generation of visual images (Pimenta & Santana, 2007 cit in Vitorino, 2008). Attached to a text, there are textual genres which are embedded in cultures, developing and being characterized by their linguistic and structural peculiarities, as well as, for their communicative and institutional functions.

Indeed, all textual genres are considered multimodal since in all language actions, whether spoken or written, we use, as representations, gestures and words, words and melodies, words and images. In the studies by the same authors, these form a multimodal text (Vitorino, 2008, p. 53).

To analyze children's drawings we will take into account several factors which we believe are essential for interpreting the results of this study. Thus, according to the analysis of multimodal texts, Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) follow the theoretical metafunctions concept of Halliday (1985), adjusting it in a better adaptation to the visual semiotic mode.

Therefore, the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions are “translated” by Kress & Van Leeuwen’s Visual Grammar (1996) into representational, interactive and compositional meanings respectively (Vicentini & Carmo, 2010, p. 66). We present here a table on the main features of the Visual Design Grammar, based on Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996), taken from Vicentini & Carmo (2010, p. 66) that will be the analysis tool which will help to observe the results of the analysis of the drawings.

Recursos da gramática de design visual			
Significados representacionais		Significados interativos	Significados composicionais
estruturas narrativas	estruturas conceituais		
• Ação - transacional - não-transacional	• Classificação	• Contato - demanda - oferta	• Valor Informativo - horizontalmente - dado/novo - verticalmente - ideal/real - centralizado - periférico
• Reacional - transacional - não-transacional	• Analítica - parte - todo	• Distância social - plano fechado - plano medio - plano aberto	• Enquadramento
• Mental	• Simbólica - atributo - sugestivo	• Ponto de vista - Ângulo frontal - ou posição de perfil - Ângulo vertical (alto, baixo, nível dos olhos)	• Saliência
• Verbal			• Modalidade - naturalista - científica

Table 1: Visual Design Grammar’s resources

The representational meanings are realized in a concrete or abstract way by the participants, i.e., individuals, places or things. Such meaning can be branched into two structures: the narratives which take into account representations and events; and the conceptuais which relate to the representation of the participants’ “essence” and can be taken either from a classification point of view (when the participants are portrayed out of context), from an analytical point of view (when certain parts of the body are emphasized) or from a symbolic point of view (when other objects or attributes that suggest cultural or symbolic meanings are portrayed) (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996 cit in Vicentini & Carmo, 2010).

The interactive meanings are expressed by the type of interaction established between the participants, the image producers and the readers of such visual messages, through contact, social distance, and point of view (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996 cit in Vicentini & Carmo, 2010).

Contact focused on the representation of the participants’ eye direction, indicating the degree of social affinity. Thus, Kress e Van Leewen (1996) claim that there are two ways of establishing it: the demand (when the participant makes eye contact with the reader) and the offer (when the participant does not make eye contact

with the reader). In what concerns social distance, it reflects the proximity between the reader and the observer; there are two fundamental levels: the close-up, the medium shot and the long shot. These levels reflect the proximity/distance relationship and are verifiable through the total or partial representation of the human body (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996 cit in Vicentini & Carmo, 2010).

Regarding point of view, Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996) define power relationships and removal/involvement through the angles formed between reader and image. In relation to the power relationships verifiable in the vertical angle, there are three types of angle: the high (at the eye level) and the low, which convey the observer's degree of power towards the image or vice versa. Regarding the relationship of removal or involvement, verifiable in the horizontal angle, there are the frontal and profile angles which transmit, respectively, engagement or impartiality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996 cit. in Vicentini & Carmo, 2010).

The compositional meanings have three intrinsic systems: information value, projection and framing which relate to the adaptation of format or layout, in order to convey consistence and cohesion (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996 cit. in Vicentini & Carmo, 2010).

In what concerns information value, this is connected to the meanings assigned to the elements and function of its location at a given page, taking into account the relationships of left and right, top and bottom (polarization), center and margin (centralization). In regard to the projection, we can observe the configuration of the elements, that is, size, intensity and perspective, which have the purpose of attracting the observer's attention in different degrees. Lastly, the framing connects the elements or space integration groups and may or may not be connected amongst them (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996 cit. in Vicentini & Carmo, 2010).

Methodological Procedures

This study was conducted in four classes from a Group of Schools in the district of Santarem. The participants were eighty four third-grade students in the ages between eight and eleven.

Our analysis is of drawings made by said students through the sociolinguistics criteria – visual design – by Kress e Van Leeuwen (1996), listed previously, having as independent variable the pupils' gender.

It should be noted that, in the first instance, the categories of grammar were taken into account and then, with the aid of mathematical sciences, namely statistics, we proceeded to a comparison of the results, both from males and from females.

Regarding how we put the study into practice, it is important to underline that, as an introduction to this theme, we conducted a lecture with a psychologist who has been researching the area of bullying with students of this age group. Later, within the classroom context, the students from the four classes were asked to express through drawings what had sensitized them the most throughout the event.

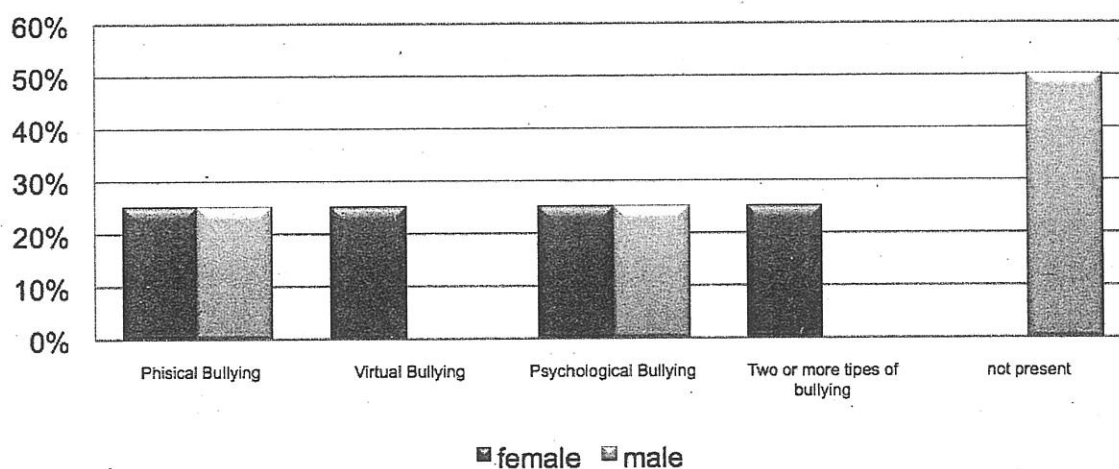
Result analysis

With regard to our initial question "can multimodal analysis contribute to the understanding of bullying issues concerning gender differences?", we can answer affirmatively, since the results on a representational, compositional and interactive level allow us to draw some conclusions about how female and male students "visualize" bullying.

Representational meaning

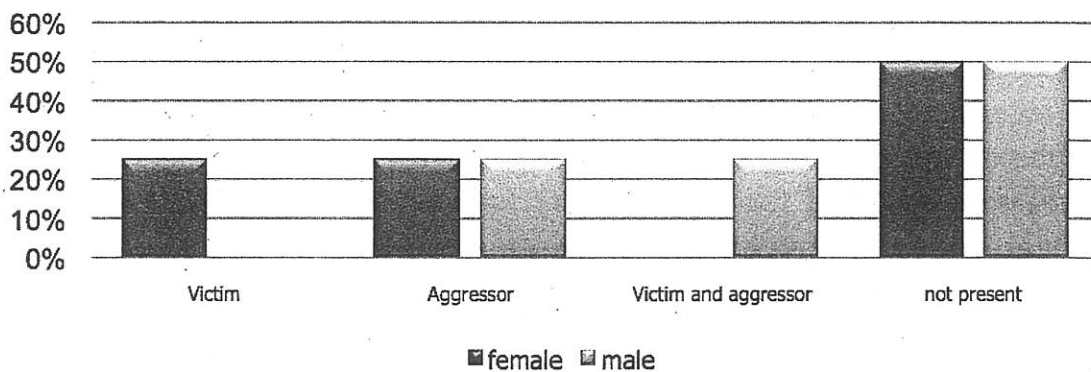
In terms of representational meanings, all analyzed drawings attempt to convey a "story", so the level of narrative structure is strongly present (Joly, 1996). However, within this framework, we found that 50% of boys did not represent any kind of bullying (as demonstrated on Graph 1) while all girls represented at least one type of bullying. This fact goes against what Cunha (2007) believes since the boys' drawings should represent more action than the girls', which in this case does not happen as we found more physical and verbal interaction in the girls' drawings. Besides, according to the same author, we can see, in the drawings of boys, details in clothing and accessories, relatively dark colors and there is a perception of depth in what concerns space representation. Regarding verbal actions, they are mainly the victims' cries for help, verbal aggressions and threats.

Graph 1: Narrative Structure - types of bullying



Considering Graph 2, we observe that only girls represent the victim's cry for help. We consider that this aspect is in tune with the propensity that the female gender shows in manipulating its communicative abilities, like Seixas (2009) refers. Through this analysis we believe that the girls more easily "cry for help" in bullying situations than boys. In what concerns the relationship between victim and observer, we found a 25% difference in facial representation.

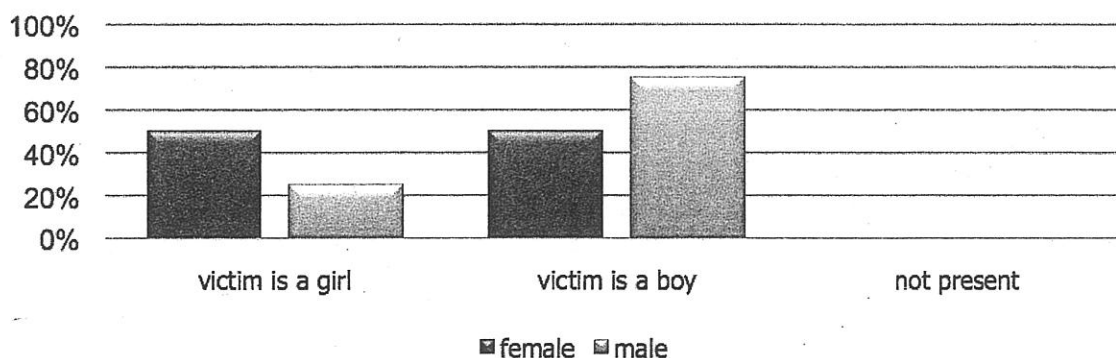
Graph 2: Narrative Structure - Verbal action



Therefore, we can infer that boys are more passive towards "feelings" whether the victim's or the aggressor's. According to Katwijk (s.d), such passivity can represent a potential danger to society since "what happens to children who are silent spectators and are not sympathetic to bullying victims, will become indifferent adults in presence of bullying in the work place. They will be neutral" (Katwijk, s.d. p. 132).

Regarding the symbolic conceptual structure, we found that all children chose to insert at least one of the interveners of bullying. Thus, when analyzing Graph 3, we conclude that the girls identified the victim's sex in equal percentage whereas boys identified themselves more as victims than the girls (Boel & Silva, s.d.).

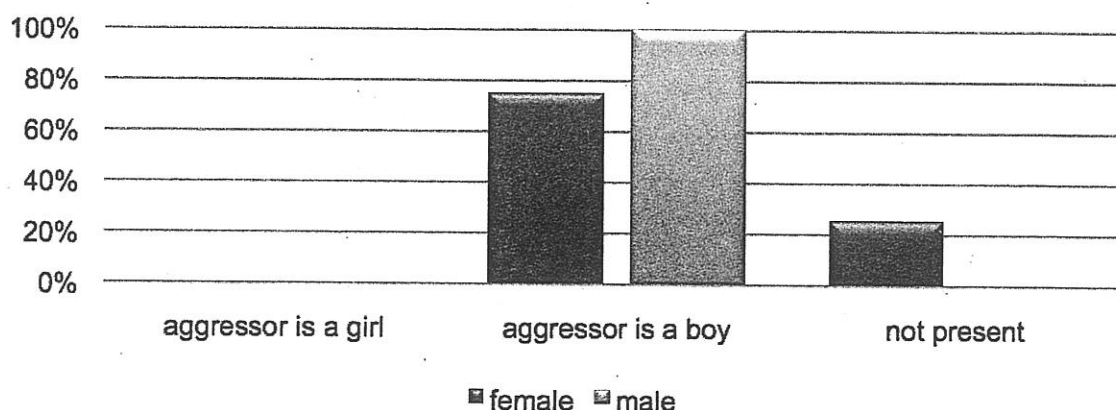
Graph 3: Conceptual Structure - sex of victim



Regarding the aggressor, none of the children identified the females as a potential aggressor, either because the aggressor is not present or is a male, as we can see in Graph 4. When analyzing the observers, we found that both girls and boys represent their sex as observers, i.e., when this intervener is drawn, girls represent females and boys represent males. Such a fact can be compared to the study of Belloti, quoted by Boel and Silva (s.d.), in which it is stated that, given the drawings analyzed, boys draw men and girls draw women. The results also mirror Salmivalli et al.'s study (1996) where it is noted that boys "play more frequently the role of aggressor, as well as the role of the aggressor's assistant and back-up" (Salmivalli et al. (1996) cit. Seixas 2009, p. 72). However, the study differs from our results, at the point where it mentions that "the roles more frequently played by girls refer to the victims' defenders and external watchers" (Salmivalli et al. (1996) cit. Seixas 2009, p. 72) since in this investigation the percentage of male external watchers is superior to those of females by 25%.

Also, in regard to the conceptual structure, when we analyze the victim's position towards the aggressors, we found that only the males represented them as having the same size thus conveying the notion of belonging to the same group. Nonetheless, 75% of the females represented the victim to be smaller than the aggressor, giving the impression that the aggressors attack younger children. The same does not happen when we analyze the size analogy between victim and observer, since 50% of the males suggest that the observers are older than the victim (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996 cit in Vicentini & Carmo, 2010). Therefore, such fact leads us to believe that children gave special relevance to the observer's role as an "older" presence as well as presenting a vision of inferiority between victim and aggressor, both in age and physical/verbal power.

Graph 4: Conceptual Structure - sex of aggressor

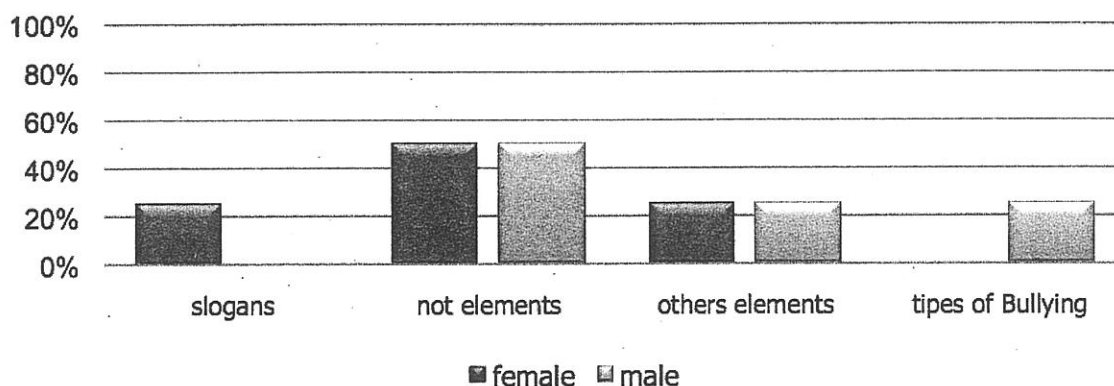


Compositional meaning

Within the compositional meaning, in what concerns the information value, 50% of the students positioned the observer on the right side, i.e., where, according to the visual grammar of Kress e Van Leween (1996) "the new" appears. Regarding the victims, 75% of the girls represent them as "the known". We can conclude, that the new element is the observer, at least for the majority of the group.

In what concerns polarization, we found that 75% of the females place the slogan "Say no to Bullying", at the top of the page, displaying "perfection", according to Kress e Van Leween (1996). However, 25% placed the slogan at the bottom of the page. We can conclude that all girls tried to convey the message whereas none of the boys did – Graph 5.

Graph 5: Informarion Value - Polarization



As we have already mentioned, once again the female stands out as the most "sensitive" of the sexes in regard to the process of victimization and the "transmission" of slogans, adopting attitudes that exhibit non-violence, mirroring the study of Rigby e Slee (1991) in which they argue that "girls tend to take on the role of advocate and protector of the victims more frequently than boys" (Seixas, 2009, p.73).

Regarding the projection on the element of color, we can state that the colors used in 75% of the drawings are strong colors, with the colors yellow, red, blue and green prevailing. The crucial element for gender differentiation is the representation of human figures, with different clothing for each gender (Boel e Silva, s.d.). Still in reference to this parameter of the compositional meaning, we can observe that both males and females represented the interveners of bullying as we can see on the more or less importance given to each intervener (Kress & Van Leeuwen cit in Vicentini & Carmo, 2010).

To conclude on the level of compositional meaning analysis, we have yet to examine the framing in which we found that 50 % of girls use strong colors whereas the other 50% use cold colors. As for the boys, 100% use strong and cold colors. However, Cunha (2007) argues that, in their drawings, girls often use light colors whereas boys use darker. The predominance goes to the connection of colors in females and males, although that does not occur in 25% in the case of females (Boel & Silva, s.d.).

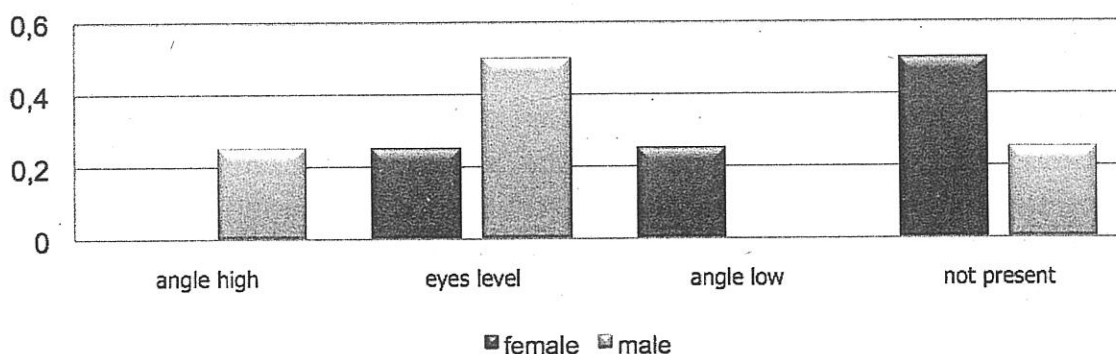
The characters' clothes are also a way of differentiating the representations of boys and girls, present in 100% of the cases (Cunha, 2007). The drawings reveal a strong use of geometrical forms when representing the male figure, visible in 100% of the cases, mainly through dashes and dots in the characters' faces (Boel & Silva, s.d.).

Interactive meaning

The interactive meanings are expressed by the type of interaction established between the represented participants (Kress & Van Leeuwen, (1996).

Regarding contact between the victim and the aggressor, we found that only 25% of the boys didn't position their eyes towards the reader. Thus, according to the visual grammar, we can infer that boys present a "greater affinity" in regard to this aspect than girls (Boel & Silva, s.d.).

Graph 6: Power of relation - observer



In what concerns power relationships, we found no difference between males and females since 75% of the boys and girls position the eyes of both victims and aggressors on the same level, exhibiting a relationship of equality between reader and observer. However, as can be seen on Graph 6, 25% of the boys place the observer at a high angle whereas 25% of the girls place the observer at a low angle. Thus, we can infer that the girls, when using the low angle, reveal more power for the reader over the "observer". However, the sample represented their drawings at an open angle, establishing these data as an attempt at detachment from bullying behaviors (Boel & Silva, s.d.).

Final remarks

We began this paper by reflecting on the role of multimodality and visual design grammar in the scope of sociolinguistics. Researchers such as Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996) contributed to the understanding of certain visual meanings (representational, interactive and compositional) which in this case aim to help answer the following question: Can multimodal analysis contribute to the understanding of bullying in what concerns gender differences?

On the level of the narrative structure – types of bullying, we verified that none of the boys represented any kind of bullying and that all the girls represented at least one type of bullying. Regarding the narrative structure – verbal action, we observed that only the girls represented the victim's cry for help. In what concerns the narrative structure – reactions of the observer and the observed, we can consider that there is a difference in the transmission of feelings since girls have a greater tendency to express them.

On the level of the Symbolic Conceptual Structure – relationship between the victim and observer, whereas girls presented equally female and male victims, the boys represented a higher percentage of male victims. We also found that none of the children identified the female as potential aggressors and that, in the drawings displaying observers, girls represent females and boys represent males. Regarding Conceptual Structure – the relationship between the victim and the observed, the same male percentage has represented the two interveners as having the same size, whereas a higher percentage of the girls represented the victim as smaller than the aggressor.

As for the Information Value, half of the boys and girls drew the observer on the right side. Only girls drew the victim and the observer on the right side and a higher percentage of the boys drew the aggressor on the right side, whereas a greater percentage of the boys represented the victim on the left side and only the girls drew the aggressor on the left side.

The analysis of the Polarization showed a higher percentage of girls placing the slogan "Say no to Bullying" at the top of the page whereas most boys placed it at the bottom.

In what concerns Projection, both sexes used strong colors such as yellow, red, blue and green but it was possible to identify the gender of the drawer by the clothing. In the foreground there is always the display of those involved in bullying.

In what concerns Contact, all the girls and most of the boys positioned the eyes towards the reader.

In terms of the Power Relationships, only the girls represented the observer at a low angle whereas boys represented the observer at a high angle; a higher percentage of girls when compared to that of boys represented the observer at eye level.

We can thus conclude that there are significant differences between male and female representations to which the multimodal analysis can contribute, for an understanding of bullying and gender differences. Girls represent more bullying types than boys; only girls represent the victim's cry for help; neither sex identifies the females as potential aggressors; regarding the relationship between victim and observer, the boys represent victims of both sexes whereas girls represent a higher percentage of male victims; all the girls represent the viewer at a low angle; all the boys represent the viewer at a high angle.

As conductors of this study, we intend to give our contribution, albeit modest, to the resolution of some bullying situations.

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