SOUTHERN VOICES: SUBVERSIVE LITERACIES OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN ADULT EDUCATION

VOZES DO SUL: LETRAMENTOS SUBVERSIVOS DE MULHERES MIGRANTES NA EDUCAÇÃO DE JOVENS E ADULTOS

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ABSTRACT

Street's (1984) concept of "ideological model" advocates for the plural character of literacy, validating all models of writing. From this perspective, marginalized literacy practices are as legitimate as dominant literacy practices, despite being socially stigmatized. In this article, I aim to investigate in what ways the literacy narratives of two adult students transgress social and linguistic norms. I employ a narrative analysis methodology that incorporates the discursive, situated and performative nature of the stories (MOITA LOPES, 2021) I analyze. At the social level, access to reading and writing is, for the students, a subversion of imposed norms that deprived them of the right to education. As women who migrated from the northeast to the southeast of Brazil in search of better living conditions, returning to school and learning to read and write are acts of resistance that challenge the *status quo*. At the linguistic level, the students reaffirm their enunciative intentions by transgressing the standard norm of the language, expanding the possibilities of meaning in their texts through the subversive use of punctuation and deixis. The outcomes emphasize the need to recognize the students' literacy journey as a social criticism against insufficient policies on the provision of quality education for all. Furthermore, the outcomes point to the need for language teaching and learning approaches that recognize non-institutionalized models of literacy as valid knowledge that enhances and enriches language learning, minimizing the abyssal line (SANTOS, 2010) between orality and literacy as well as between school and non-school knowledge.

Keywords: literacies; epistemologies of the South; language education.

RESUMO

O conceito de "letramento ideológico" (STREET, 1984) permite-nos validar todo e qualquer modelo de escrita. Nessa perspectiva, práticas de letramento marginalizado são tão legítimas, apesar de serem socialmente estigmatizadas, quanto práticas de letramento dominante. Neste artigo, investigo de que forma a escrita de duas estudantes da Educação de Jovens e Adultos se configura como uma subversão de normas sociais e linguísticas. Para tanto, utilizo a análise narrativa como metodologia que incorpora a natureza discursiva, situada e performativa das histórias estudadas (MOITA LOPES, 2021). No nível social, o acesso à leitura e à escrita é, para as estudantes, uma subversão de normas impostas, que as privaram do direito à educação. Na condição de mulheres que migraram do Nordeste para o Sudeste brasileiro em busca de melhores condições de vida, voltar a estudar e aprender a ler e escrever são atos de resistência que desafiam o *status quo*. No nível linguístico, as alunas reiteram suas intencionalidades enunciativas ao transgredirem a norma-padrão da língua portuguesa, ampliando as possibilidades de sentido dos textos a partir do uso subversivo de pontuação e dêiticos. Os resultados enfatizam a necessidade de reconhecer as histórias de letramento das estudantes como uma denúncia à atuação insuficiente do Estado quanto à oferta de educação de qualidade a todos. Ademais, os resultados indicam a necessidade de um ensino de língua que reconheça escritas não institucionalizadas como saberes a serem estudados em sala de aula, minimizando a linha abissal (SANTOS, 2010) entre oralidade e escrita e entre saberes escolares e não escolares.

Palavras-chave: letramentos; epistemologias do sul; educação linguística.

INTRODUCTION

As hegemonic Eurocentric worldview persists in marginalizing the plurality of knowledges, leading to social and cognitive injustice (SANTOS; MENESES, 2010), in this article I highlight literacy journeys and writing styles of two women who moved from northeastern to southeastern Brazil in search of better living conditions. I focus on "southern voices" (SANTOS; MENESES, 2010) expressed through marginalized literacies that emerge from the intersectionality of gender, social class and migration.

While academia acknowledges the diverse nature of language, linguistic discrimination remains prevalent in society, including in educational settings where students' identities should be fully respected. The recent ban on certain words in teenage students' work by schools in the United Kingdom exemplifies this prejudice. Linguists agree that language discrimination is influenced by social, age, ethnic, and geographic factors, among others. For instance, Orelus (2012) describes his journey as a Black Caribbean immigrant from Haiti to the

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United States, exploring the ways in which he has been racially and linguistically positioned, as well as how he negotiated this position. His life story reaffirms that all forms of oppression are connected in a way that racism, xenophobia, linguicism, etc. should not be analyzed separately (ORELUS, 2012). This represents the case of linguistic discrimination against individuals originating from northeastern Brazil (XAVIER, 2020), perpetuated by the prevailing perspective from the southern and southeastern regions.

As studies on linguicism are often grounded in sociolinguistics, scholars focus on spoken language traits, such as accent and lexicon. These studies are crucial for understanding the plural character of spoken language and the social factors associated with linguicism. Equally important is the need to recognize that written language also varies. The still remaining idea of a single model of writing contributes to the perpetuation of linguistic discrimination. For instance, previous work (BARBOSA; MARTINS NETO, 2019) has reported the existence of an online community on Facebook, claiming to be "in favor of our Portuguese language", who shares and makes fun of written posts that do not conform to the standard language. It is noteworthy that the significant disparity between spoken and written Brazilian Portuguese can be largely attributed to the influence of prescriptive grammar derived from European Portuguese. Duarte and Serra (2015) analyze rap lyrics in European Portuguese, highlighting how the informal language structure is similar to the normative grammar. In contrast, they note that Brazilian rap lyrics deviate considerably from this normative standard, primarily because Brazilian prescriptive grammar is influenced by the European one.

The concept of a single model of writing that conforms to the standard language leads to a biased divide between literate and illiterate individuals. For instance, individuals from southern and southeastern Brazil often perceive themselves as more intellectually and culturally superior, alleging that "northeasterners" are illiterate and, therefore, incapable of making informed voting decisions, electing unsatisfactory governors (SILVA, 2016). As a consequence, there are assertions, especially during election cycles, advocating for the division of the country. This separatist view has been defended, for instance, by "The South is My Country" [*O Sul é o Meu País*], a movement that has been trying to create a country from the three southernmost states of Brazil: Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. From this separatist view, one can imply an imaginary segregation, among others, between literate and illiterate individuals. Silva (2016) clarifies that the perception of northeastern Brazil as a marginal area resulted not only from social and economic practices but also from discursive and state constructions that have perpetuated patterns of colonial and modern exclusion.

There is extensive research on northeastern-southeastern migration within Brazil, but only few studies have focused on migrant women (SOUZA; SILVEIRA, 2010). This gap exists primarily because theories on migration have emphasized the role of men as providers for the family, neglecting the increasing number of migrant women and their multiple roles, including their responsibility for providing for the family (LISBOA, 2006). Thus, it is urgent to hear voices of migrant women, particularly of those who were forced to move away as a consequence of socioeconomic oppression. Their life stories, struggles and knowledges can be a starting point to fight for social and cognitive justice.

In this article, I examine in what ways two migrant women transgress social and linguistic norms through narratives they produced at school, resulting in literacy as a tool of resistance and meaning-making. The findings can help teachers and policymakers recognize marginalized voices as knowledges that enhance and enrich educational practices and, at the same time, provide a more plural, inclusive, and equitable approach to teaching and learning. Looking at students' literacies and life stories from a southern perspective is a useful way to make room for linguistic creativity and a meaningful education.

1. LITERACIES AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Sociocultural approaches to literacy (HEATH, 1983; STREET, 1984) introduce concepts that are helpful for understanding the narratives I analyze in this article: ideological model of literacy, vernacular and dominant literacies, and literacy events and practices. In tandem with the latest advancement in the field, I explore these concepts and their potential intersections with "epistemologies of the South" (SANTOS; MENESES, 2010) in three dimensions: plurality, situatedness, and hybridism.

1.1 The plural character of literacies

In the 1980s, scholars (HEATH, 1983; STREET, 1984) challenged the traditional psychology-oriented understanding of literacy, suggesting that literacy is predominantly a sociocultural phenomenon rather than merely a collection of individual reading and writing skills. Street (1984) criticizes and names as "autonomous" this traditional definition, which views reading (decoding) and writing (coding) as neutral tools. This concept suggests that there is only one valid model of writing. In contrast, Street (1984) argues for an "ideological" model, which is characterized by a plurality of literacy varieties. Street's (1984) claim for the plural character of literacy, or literacies, is crucial for respecting and validating all models of writing, particularly those which have been socially marginalized. In this sense, previous work (BARBOSA; MARTINS NETO, 2019) has described how Facebook and WhatsApp users make intentional spelling "errors" which are indispensable for the construction of the meaning they intend to convey. The investigation reports that the plural character of literacy reflects the dynamic and (linguistic) diversity of the platform users, who perform their identities within online communities by reinventing traces of the written language.

Street's (1984) recognition of the plural character of literacy is in line with Santos and Meneses's (2010) notion of "epistemologies of the South", which recognizes the existence of multiple knowledges, in contrast with the imposition of a singular and universal Eurocentric comprehension of the world. Santos and Meneses (2010) highlight how colonialism led to the dominance of certain knowledge while invisibilizing others. Viewing the Global South as a space historically colonized by the Global North, particularly by Europe, Santos and Meneses (2010) metaphorically extend "South" beyond geography to encompass marginalized knowledges originating from non-dominant contexts historically oppressed by colonialism and capitalism. As Pennycook and Makoni (2020) exemplify, Global South theories include people, places and ideas excluded from the grand narrative of modernity. If, geographically, it can at times literally refer to regions such as South America and much of Africa, that have not experienced the economic, social, and political "progress" of wealthier nations, it also includes broader histories of social and intellectual marginalization, encompassing Indigenous communities worldwide and urban poor areas in the Northern hemisphere (PENNYCOOK; MAKONI, 2020).

While Street's definition of literacy does not explicitly focus on the fight for social or cognitive justice, as Santos and Meneses's concept of epistemologies of the South does, his theoretical foundations have paved the way for studies on marginalized literacies and on the role dominant literacies play in invisibilized communities. Souza (2001), for instance, describes the meanings of literacy for the Kaxinawá people — an indigenous community in Brazil — in relation to their cosmogonic ideology, addressing identity, alterity and transformation as inherent to their writings. Sito (2010) describes literacy practices of leaders of a Quilombola[1] community within the context of dialogue with the Brazilian government, revealing the necessity of adapting to dominant literacies to secure their land rights. Recent works have combined the ideological model of literacy with Global South Theories, not only describing the plurality of marginalized knowledges but also understanding them as tools against social and cognitive inequalities. For instance, Yang (2023) examines his own literacy autobiography and those of his graduate students, arguing that literacy autobiographies from a Global South perspective can be reimagined as a form of critical pedagogy for EFL writing teaching and learning, as well as a cultural tool for analyzing and reshaping both students' and teachers' sense of self in ever-expanding dialogical spaces.

1.2 The situated character of literacies

As the aforementioned autonomous model views literacy as a set of individual skills (STREET, 1984), literacy counts as an independent variable, that is, a separate entity in isolation from broader social and cultural contexts. In contrast, the ideological model holds literacy as a culturally embedded practice, acknowledging diverse meanings and models of literacy depending on the time, place and group of people.

Heath (1983) coined the term "literacy event" to refer to activities in which written language plays a central role, usually involving one or more texts and conversations around these texts. Events are observable episodes, often linked to routine activities, such as parents reading stories to their children and discussing them. While some events may be part of formal procedures and expectations of social institutions, such as workplace and

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1 Quilombolas are descendants of enslaved Africans who escaped and formed their own settlements in Brazil.

school, others are structured by the more informal expectations and pressures of home or peer group (BARTON; HAMILTON, 2000). In this sense, Street (2014) argues that events are shaped by literacy practices, that is, cultural ways of using written language, including values, attitudes, feelings, social relations, and the very meaning of literacy for a particular group. Practices are influenced by social rules that regulate the use and distribution of texts and exist in the relationships between individuals, groups, and communities (BARTON; HAMILTON, 2000). In short, events involve specific texts and people situated in a particular place and time, emerging from and being shaped by situated practices, which are broader social contexts.

The notion of practice is associated with the different "domains of life" (e.g., home, work, and school), contributing to the idea that people participate in distinct "discourse communities" (BARTON; HAMILTON, 2000). This is to say that different literacy practices are associated with different social institutions. While "socially powerful institutions, such as education, tend to support dominant literacy practices (…), other vernacular literacies which exist in people's everyday lives are less visible and less supported" (BARTON; HAMILTON, 2000, p. 12). This is in line with Santos and Meneses (2010), for whom every social experience produces and reproduces knowledge, and all knowledges are contextual, that is, socio-historically situated and local. The "dominant epistemology", born from the oppressive forces of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, asserted a false universality, suppressing all social practices of knowledge that contradicted its interests (SANTOS; MENESES, 2010). In contrast, "epistemologies of the South", made invisible by the dominant ways of knowing, are born in the struggles against these three forces, the main forms of modern domination (SANTOS; MENESES, 2020). Epistemologies of the South are an alternative way of thinking of alternatives to the oppressive hegemonic worldview (SANTOS; MENESES, 2020), and Street's (1984) ideological model is a helpful framework to comprehend marginalized literacy practices.

1.3 The hybrid character of literacies

The autonomous model of literacy, criticized by Street (1984), contrasts written with oral communication, adopting a dichotomous view that divides the "literate" from the "illiterate", suggesting that there is only one valid model of writing. This perspective views literacy as synonyms for civilization, progress, and economic and cognitive development, describing oral communities as primitives who have lower logical thinking. In this sense, other literacies are considered inferior and, therefore, are marginalized. Based on the investigation of the Anangu people of Australia's models of literacy practices, Armitage (2023) establishes a significant connection between the oral-literate paradigm with the Santos's notion of "abyssal line". Santos (2010) argues that the western modern way of thinking creates a division of social reality into two separate universes: one that is privileged and visible, and one that is marginalized and rendered invisible. This concept of "abyssal lines" helps to illustrate how knowledge and practices on the marginalized side of this divide — the southern voices — are often ignored and dismissed by dominant epistemologies.

Opposite to the autonomous model, the ideological model understands that literacy overlaps with orality. Linguistic marks from oral and written practices coexist (CORRÊA, 2001) in a way that a so-called "interference" of orality in writing only makes sense from an autonomous perspective of literacy (SIGNORINI, 2001). Rather than viewing heterogeneity as an incidental feature of writing, Corrêa (2001) argues that it is constitutive of writing itself. Corrêa's (2001) perspective diverges from the concept of "heterogeneity *in* writing" as an accidental attribute and proposes the notion of "heterogeneity *of* writing" as inherent or intrinsic, in line with Signorini's (2001) concept of hybridism. Both Corrêa (2001) and Signorini (2001) challenge conventional perceptions of literacy by exploring vernacular literacies and how heterogeneity/hybridity benefits the writer's communicative intentions.

These studies are in accordance with the notion of "ecologies of knowledges" (SANTOS, 2010), which endorses a dynamic interaction between multiple worldviews, challenging hegemonic knowledge production through South–South knowledge exchanges (R'BOUL, 2023). Corrêa (2001), Signorini (2011) and Armitage (2023), among other scholars framed in a sociocultural perspective of literacy, argue for the horizontalization not only between oral and literacy practices but also between different models of literacies, highlighting the urgent need of comprehending and recognizing marginalized literacy practices as situated knowledges.

Although dominant and vernacular/marginalized literacies can be seen as opposed in some ways, individuals participate in different discourse communities in a way that the domains of life overlap (BARTON; HAMILTON, 2000). In addition, conceiving of literacies as dominant or vernacular based solely on their institutional context, overlooking the complex relationships built between the individuals and their social groups, is overly simplistic (DE GRANDE, 2015). For instance, I have reported elsewhere (MARTINS NETO, 2020) that teenagers' use of written language on Facebook alternates between dominant and vernacular literacy practices, indicating that power relationships within these practices are flexible rather than static.

1.4 Literacies from the Global South

Understanding literacies as local and socio-cultural knowledges, as Street proposes, paves the way to validate marginalized literacies, viewing the world as plural as it is indeed. One question that raises, however, is if studies focused on the description of marginalized literacies, as those mentioned in this article, are sufficient to promote social and cognitive justice as Santos and Meneses (2010) propose. That is: in what ways can (studies on) *southern literacies* contribute to an "ecology of knowledges" (SANTOS, 2010), not only resisting to the vertical hegemonic model of literacy that divides individuals into (functionally) literate or illiterate but also proposing a horizontal dialogue that leads to a dynamic exchange and integration of diverse knowledge systems?

In educational settings, I agree with Yang (2023) on the potential that narrative literacies have to validate and expand students' voices, raising awareness of their positions as individuals who generate knowledge. In addition, I advocate for "culturally hybrid zones" (MARTINS NETO; ALMEIDA, 2021) in school literacy practices, promoting a critical dialogue between what has been referred to as "school knowledge", on one side, and "students' prior knowledge", on the other side. Culturally hybrid zones relativize cultural hierarchies and, thereby, question what counts as school knowledge: "it is about relativizing vernacular and dominant models of literacy in the classroom, so that they are neither one nor the other – neither school nor non-school – but are both at the same time" (MARTINS NETO; ALMEIDA, 2021). Different knowledges can articulate and coexist.

Grounded in the theoretical framework discussed above, in the following sections I contextualize and discuss the data of this article, namely, literacy narratives of two migrant women who were disenfranchised from their right to education but transgressed social norms and returned to school as adults.

2. CONTEXT, PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

From February to April 2023, I delivered the course "Writing production" within the National Program for the Integration of Professional Education with Basic Education in the Youth and Adult Education Modality [*Programa Nacional de Integração da Educação Profissional com a Educação Básica na Modalidade de Educação de Jovens e Adultos - PROEJA*] for first-year secondary students at the Federal Institute of São Paulo [*Instituto Federal de São Paulo - IFSP*], my current institution. The program targets people over the age of 18 who did not finish school, offering secondary technical education. The syllabus of the course I taught focuses on "life stories and memories", encouraging students to read and write autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters and other genres through which they can tell (their) life stories.

I had 13 students, of whom five were men and eight were women. The men were aged 39 to 71 years old. Three of them were born in the state of São Paulo, one was born in Paraíba, a northeastern state in Brazil, and one came from Haiti. The person from Haiti immigrated to Brazil in search of better living conditions. The women were aged 29 to 52 years old. Four of them were born in the state of São Paulo, and four migrated from a northern or northeastern Brazilian state. The fact that almost half of the group (6) was not from São Paulo, where the lessons took place, reveals that a notable proportion of migrants were unable to complete their education during childhood. This situation portraits social inequalities and disenfranchisement among individuals from different regions of Brazil.

In one of the first lessons in February 2023, students were encouraged to discuss about literacy biographies. We watched videos and read poems on the topic before sharing our own literacy experiences orally. Then, students were asked to write about their experiences. The texts consisted basically of the stories that they had shared orally. Then, I took their work home with the aim to use it as a starting point to help them develop writing skills, based

on their needs. In an attempt to enhance the students' language skills, I focused on mistakes they had committed. I corrected spelling mistakes and, in two of the texts, pointed out traits of orality to help the students improve their writing skills. But I was lucky to realize, before I gave them my feedback, that my proposed changes to these two texts would probably change their communicative intentionality. I caught myself looking at their texts "from normative lenses" (SIGNORINI, 2001) and, for a moment, I seemed to have forgot that heterogeneity is inherent to writing (CORRÊA, 2001). This situation intrigued me, and before returning their handwritten texts, I typed them up on my computer to keep a copy for myself. One year later, I came across the call for this special issue of the journal *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, which I envisioned as an opportunity to have the abovementioned southern voices heard.

The narratives I report in this article were written by two women, pseudonymized Fernanda (46) and Regina (48). As said before, they moved from northeastern to southeastern Brazil in search of better living conditions. The texts were written as part of a school activity when neither I nor the students knew that they would become data for scientific dissemination. I obtained Informed Consent from the participants in March 2024.

Narratives are discursive practices and, therefore, they should be analyzed taking into account the discursive-interactional context in which they occur, examining situated meanings (MOITA LOPES, 2021). Consequently, my analysis is based on several factors: the participants' background, the educational environment where the texts were written, the power relations among those involved in the literacy event, and broader social aspects that permeate the students' stories. Data were analyzed in two phases. At the first level, I looked at the students' texts focusing on what counts as literacy for them, since "in New Literacy Studies, researchers try to suspend judgment about what constitutes literacy for the people they are working with, until they can understand what it means for the people themselves" (MAYBIN, 2000, p. 199). I analyzed the use of subjective terms such as "happy" and "magical", as well as connectors indicative of argumentative ideas, such as "because" and "but". Additionally, I analyzed expressions of time, such as "when a child" and "in our childhood". At the second level, I examined how Fernanda and Regina subvert written language, specifically through the use of punctuation and spatial deixis, respectively.

3. DISCUSSION

As a literacy event situated in school, a powerful social institution, the production of the narratives was permeated by relations of power between my students and me, shaped by broader educational issues such as school norms and curricula. Although student-teacher interactions in this group were usually informal, with students often engaging orally with me and their peers in their language variety, they tended to self-monitor their writing activities, often trying to avoid mistakes. For instance, while Fernanda was writing her text, she wrote "altidor" instead of "outdoor" (an English word used in Brazilian Portuguese to mean "billboard"). Since she was unsure about the spelling, she asked me for clarification before handing in her writing assignment.

The students are adults whose right to education was interrupted when they were children and, therefore, they are now learning to write according to normative grammar. Their texts, originally written in Portuguese, contain slips, some of which were translated into English, where possible and relevant, to give readers a better understanding of the students' writing. For instance, instead of "*fase*" ("phase", in English), Fernanda wrote "*face*". In the English version, "phase" was written as "phace". Some slips, such as lack of diacritics, were not translated into English.

The data discussion is organized in two categories. In the first one, I discuss the meanings of literacy for Fernanda and Regina. In the second, I discuss aspects of their knowledge of language.

3.1 Fernanda's meanings of literacy

Table 1. Fernanda's literacy narrative

English version	Original in Portuguese
When a child in school *phace* I remember, as soon as I started reading everywhere I went I used to practice reading. I found beautiful the big billboard they looked like a big *blackbord* in the middle of the city. it was magical. everything for me. I used to read out loud. wasn't worried at all about people there, my mother would laugh and say read quieter. I was happy to be there walking through the city and *knowin* how to read. every *littl* letter. with time I saw how important reading is in our childhood.	Quando criança na *face* de escola me lembro, que assim que comecei a leitura a onde eu ia eu praticava a leitura. achava lindo os outdoor grandes parecia uma *losa* grande no meio da cidade. era mágico. tudo pra mim. Eu fazia a leitura com a voz alta. não ficava nem um pouco preocupada com as pessoas que ali estavam, minha mãe ria e dizia *le* mais baixo. eu ficava feliz por estar ali passeando pela cidade e *sabedo* ler. cada *letria*. com o tempo eu vi o quanto e importante a leitura na nossa infância.

In response to my writing assignment, Fernanda recalls a literacy event from her childhood: reading aloud from billboards scattered across the city. The use of Imperfect Past tense, which works similarly to the English "used to" or "would" to refer to repeated situations in the past, suggests that the event was part of her routine, positively marking her childhood. While the phrase "when a child" is sufficient to specify the time of the event, Fernanda adds her concurrent attendance at school, demonstrating that she associates her reading experiences outside school with school literacy practices. This reveals that school played an important role in Fernanda's reading acquisition development and, consequently, in shaping her perceptions of literacy. In addition, the use of "practice" in "everywhere I went I used to practice reading" suggests that Fernanda relates that event that occurred outside school grounds to educational purposes, aimed at improving skills through exercises. Oral reading, a common activity in the literacy curriculum in Brazil (ASSOLINI; TFOUNI, 1999), often lacks meaning for students, since it focuses on decoding words and improving fluency rather than promoting comprehension. Fernanda, however, resignifies this practice, finding it meaningful and enjoyable.

If events, observable episodes, emphasize the situated character of literacy and are shaped by broader cultural practices involving expectations of social institutions or informal pressures from home or peers, Fernanda's experience blends school and non-school literacy practices. She engages in oral reading, a skill acquired at school, in an event without direct teacher guidance. This demonstrates the flexibility of the concepts of literacy events and literacy practices.

The text emphasizes the positive relationship Fernanda had with written language ("I found beautiful"; "it was magical"; "everything for me") and with the mastery of letters ("I was happy" to be able to read). This joy and connection to reading, alongside her fulfillment in learning written language, are intricately tied to Fernanda's schooling experience, since she compares the billboards to a big blackboard. Akin to the literacy event she describes, school is indirectly presented as a fascinating and meaningful learning space.

The power relationship between the participants of the event, mother and daughter, appears to be balanced. When laughing ("my mom would laugh"), the mother seems to appreciate the child's reading practice, but also wishes her daughter to behave according to social norms ("read quieter"). However, for Fernanda, this social norm went unnoticed amidst her immersion in the reading activity.

The text ends with a temporal and perspective shift. Fernanda transcends the event, transitioning from childhood to adulthood, as well as from the enjoyment of reading to the importance of literacy. In addition, there is a shift from the singular first person to the plural first person ("our childhood"), indicating Fernanda's awareness of the significance of reading for people in general. This assessment of the importance of reading in childhood may stem from an awareness of the challenges faced throughout her life ("with time") due to being forced to abandon her studies. In other words, the child's harmonious relationship with reading and with school was disrupted by the deprivation of the right to education. However, Fernanda returned to school as an adult, transgressing the "norm" of educational exclusion imposed on women in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability who migrate from the northeast to the southeast of Brazil in search of a better life (SOUZA; SILVEIRA, 2010).

3.2 Regina's meanings of literacy

Table 2. Regina's literacy narrative

English version	Original in Portuguese
I was born in Pernambuco started studying, studying very young I learned. to write read but it was very difficult because I had a lot of difficulties	Eu nasci em Pernambuco comecei estudar, estudar muito jovem eu aprendi. escrever ler *mais* foi muito *dificil* porque eu tinha muitas dificuldades
But I decided to continue my studies because I wanted to *lern* more. My mother always *suported* me to continue but I missed a lot of classes I failed a lot of times because I couldn't get my mind on school I decided to change situation	Só que resolvi continuar meu estudo porque queria *apreder* mais. Minha mãe sempre me deu *apolho* para continuar mas faltava muito na escola *foi* varias vezes reprovada porque não tinha *cabeca* para estudar Resolvi mudar quadro
I came here to SP [São Paulo] decided to improve reading and writing I am very happy because I am *acomplishing* my dreams.	Vim para cá SP decidi *melhora* mas ler escrever eu estou muito feliz porque estou *conciguindo* os meus sonhos.
Cieja [Integrated Center for Youth and Adult Education] gave me a lot of strength to finish now I am here I want take courses and go to college.	Cieja me deu muitas força para eu terminar agora estou aqui quero faz curso e faculdades.

Regina highlights the complex intersection between literacy, education and family relationships. The student's relationship with writing and school is ambiguous: on the one hand, learning to read and write and attending school were difficult tasks; on the other hand, continuing her studies to improve her reading and writing was a desirable task.

The use of "because" justifies her responsibility both for the difficulty in learning to read and write ("because I had a lot of difficulties") and for school failure ("because I couldn't get my mind on school"). This responsibility is emphasized through the use of "but" in "but I missed a lot of classes". In Regina's perspective, success at school and learning to read and write seem to depend solely on individual and family effort. In this context, despite her mother's support, the student did not do her part, resulting in her "failure" at school during childhood. Regina exempts the State from its legal duty to provide quality education for all.

Given the absence of the State's commitment to ensuring continued schooling success during childhood, it falls upon Regina the responsibility to resist and create conditions to complete her studies. The use of "decide" in "I decided to continue my studies", "I decided to change situation", and "I decided to improve" reveals an individual persistence for the right to education and the desire to learn to read and write. Regina had to leave Pernambuco in pursuit of her dreams because school success was not guaranteed to her where she was.

When describing her current situation, Regina emphasizes the positive aspects of her literacy journey and her educational trajectory in adulthood: she is "happy" to be fulfilling her "dreams" of improving reading and writing skills, as well as completing high school to pursue further studies, including other courses and college. Regina mentions the support ("strength") she received at the Integrated Center for Youth and Adult Education (CIEJA), where she completed her elementary education. This late support from the school reinforces the importance of an inclusive educational environment for all. The fact that Regina faced significant difficulties throughout her childhood, including school failure, suggests there was a gap in the provision of educational support. In adulthood, with the school's support, Regina continues her studies. The "strength" received at CIEJA partially repairs the student's school dropout in childhood, but does not fully compensate for the missed opportunities throughout life or the fact that Regina was forced to leave her family behind when migrating to São Paulo.

3.3 Fernanda and Regina: Intertwined stories

The narratives shared by Fernanda and Regina highlight common points regarding their relationship with literacy, as well as the roles played by school and family.

Both students describe how literacy is crucial in their lives, emphasizing the pleasure/desire to learn to read and write. This aligns with the importance given to literacy in literate societies (GNERRE, 2009), where the ability to read becomes essential for accessing educational, professional, and personal opportunities.

Additionally, Fernanda and Regina suggest that school has been the primary literacy agency for them, since it is where they learned to read and write. This reflects the reality for most Brazilians (VERGNA, 2021), indicating that only an equitable and inclusive education can promote literacy for all, thereby reducing inequalities in access to reading and writing. However, the National Household Sample Survey [*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios – PNAD*] by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics [*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE*] reveals that 5.4% of children between 6 and 14 years old were not attending elementary school in 2023 (BELLO; BRITTO, 2024).

In addition, both Fernanda and Regina mention their mothers' role in the process of acquiring literacy, highlighting the importance of family as an emotional support source for learning. The absence of the father figure in the students' narrative may reveal issues related to gender inequality, reflecting the common societal expectation that mothers, not fathers, handle tasks such as helping with homework. This expectation is further compounded by the fact that many of these homes are single-parent households, where the parent is usually the mother. Despite this, the significant impact of fathers' support on children's literacy development should not be overlooked (LIU; CHUNG, 2022).

By continuing their studies, Fernanda and Regina break through social barriers, defying a reality often imposed on women who migrated from the northeast to the southeast of Brazil in search of better socioeconomic conditions. By claiming their rightful place in school, Fernanda and Regina challenge the *status quo*, which often marginalizes women from similar backgrounds, limiting their access to education and opportunities for upward mobility. In doing so, they also expose the lack of inclusive educational policies.

3.4 Fernanda's knowledge of punctuation

(A) I found beautiful the big billboard they looked like a big *blackbord* in the middle of the city. it was magical. everything for me.

(B) I was happy to be there walking through the city and *knowin* how to read. every *littl* letter.

When I was reading Fernanda's text, I interpreted her use of punctuation as interference of orality and underlined parts of the text to discuss them with her in the following class.

In (A), Fernanda places the phrases "it was magical" and "everything for me" between full stops; that is, she presents them as complete sentences that convey meaning on their own within the context of production. From the perspective of Portuguese normative grammar, it would be more appropriate in this case to use a comma before the pronoun "everything". Thus, the text would be as follows: "it was magical, everything for me". The use of a comma would serve to separate coordinated terms since both "magical" and "everything for me" are predicates of the subject, performing the same syntactic function. However, by isolating the fragment "everything for me" between full stops, the student indicates to the reader the rhythm of the text. This rhythm marks an increasing gradation that characterizes the student's reading experience through the following ideas: 1) beautiful; 2) magical; and 3) everything for me.

Instead of replacing the full stop with a comma, another option to adapt the passage to standard Portuguese would be to repeat the structure "it was" ["*era*", in Portuguese], elaborating the text as follows: "it was magical. It was everything for me". This repetition, unnecessary in spoken language, would disrupt the student's intentionality, that is, the full stop preceding the phrase "everything for me" violates a syntactic rule of normative grammar to approximate the text to spoken intonation, communicating the intended meaning. The unconventional full stop functions as a prosodic marker, and even without the repetition of the phrase "it was", the fragment has complete meaning because the reader easily retrieves the ellipsis from the context. Therefore, Fernanda's text presents itself as a communicative unit with complete meaning in the context.

In (B), Fernanda employs the same strategy of longer pause by isolating the fragment "every *littl* letter", indicating to the reader the rhythm of the text and emphasizing that she did not overlook any letter of the alphabet. The verb "to read" can be both intransitive and transitive, and by adding a full stop between the verb and the

complement, the student gives the sentence two complete meanings that lead to an increasing gradation: "I knew how to read" and "I knew how to read every little letter". This meaning is intensified with the use of the diminutive form (indicated by the suffix "-inha" in "letrinha", written as "letria" by Fernanda), which, in Brazilian Portuguese, goes beyond the dimensional sense, extending to notions of affection, disdain, improvement (PEREIRA, 2020), politeness, and, in Fernanda's text, completeness.

In both (A) and (B), it is important to emphasize that Fernanda's use of full stop instead of comma is based on her knowledge of punctuation. She associates prosodic characteristics with punctuation marks, since one of the functions of the full stop is to denote a longer pause (BECHARA, 2015).

3.5 Regina's knowledge of spatial deixis

(C) I came here to SP decided to improve reading and writing (…).

(D) Cieja gave me a lot of strength to finish now I am here I want take courses and go to college.

When I was reading Regina's narrative, the use of "here" in "I came here to SP" and "now I am here" immediately called my attention. I saw it as a trait of orality and underlined the word to advise Regina on her mistake in the following class.

In (C), I evaluated "here" as unnecessary and repetitive and would advise Regina to remove it. But repetition can only be viewed as an exclusive trait of orality if written language is seen as necessarily precise, objective and concise, as the autonomous model of literacy proposes. Asking Regina to erase "here" would result in what Jesus (1995) calls "hygienization of student's text", where rewriting activities become a "cleaning operation", with the aim of eliminating "impurities".

In (D), I evaluated "here" as imprecise and would advise Regina to substitute the adverb with the name of the school where she was then studying. While in face-to-face oral communication the interlocutors are in the same location, I would advise Regina that in writing there is the need to be more precise, since readers may be elsewhere. It would, therefore, I would say to her, be clearer to write "now I am at IFSP" instead of "now I am here".

In both (C) and (D), I did not consider that Regina had it clear that she was writing to me, her teacher, who was in the same space as her. In other words, she was aware that there would be no readers besides me and that her text would not circulate outside school. Advising the student that she should use spatial deixis more precisely in that context would therefore be nonsensical.

3.6 Fernanda's and Regina's knowledge of written language

Fernanda relies on her knowledge of spoken and written language to punctuate her text taking into account prosodic characteristics while Regina relies on her knowledge of spatial deixis to engage her reader effectively. The fact that Fernanda and Regina are not fully aware of the conventions of normative grammar leads them to minimize the abyssal line between orality and literacy. This unintentional "transgression" of established norms guarantees the construction of the meanings that both Fernanda and Regina seek to convey. In contrast, my knowledge of normative grammar led me to compartmentalize orality and literacy as two different worlds.

I acknowledge the importance of helping Fernanda and Regina understand the standard conventions of the Portuguese language, since this is crucial for them to achieve their life goals and have their voices heard in influential social spheres, including the workplace. However, I have learned that looking at their texts solely through the lens of normative grammar can be counterproductive, potentially silencing the essence of their message. Instead, I advocate for a teaching approach that prioritizes understanding students' perspectives, centering on their intentions. Language is dynamic, and communication needs a balance between adherence to grammatical standards and fostering space for innovative expression. Thus, while it is crucial for students to learn to write in accordance with normative grammar, it is equally necessary for them to learn to intentionally transgress writing, especially as a way of having their voices heard.

CONCLUSION

One limitation of this article is the small number of narratives analyzed. However, this allowed for a more in-depth qualitative analysis of both the students' stories and their use of written language. Across these two complementary levels that echo southern voices, I explored literacy narratives of two female students from migrant backgrounds.

Firstly, I explored the meanings of literacy for these students, who understand it as a vital tool for their personal and professional fulfillment. Within their narratives, school emerges as an important agency of literacy, while maternal support plays a pivotal role in supporting their literacy journeys. Despite their pleasure/desire to acquire literacy skills, Fernanda and Regina faced obstacles that prevented them from completing their education during childhood. However, their resolute determination and struggles led them to overcome social barriers, returning to school as adults. Their commitment to finishing their education serves as a form of resistance against the entrenched realities that often impede women from migrant and low socioeconomic backgrounds in Brazil from accessing quality education.

Secondly, I examined their use of written language, which may be interpreted as invalid when assessed through the lens of normative grammar. Fernanda and Regina unintentionally transgress standard linguistic norms and, in doing so, minimize the divide between oral and written communication, emphasizing the plural, situated, and hybrid character of literacy.

Both Street's (1984) ideological model of literacy and Santos and Meneses's epistemologies of the South (2010) are a valuable theoretical foundation not only for legitimating students' linguistic background but also for acknowledging it as new knowledges imbued with specific intentionalities. Furthermore, the conceptual framework used in this article helps stress the importance of acknowledging students' stories and struggles as efforts to access literacy through education, despite the systemic challenges that impede their progress – a responsibility that often falls short on the part of the Brazilian State. Viewing their narratives through southern lenses reframes them not as individuals defeated by circumstances, but as resilient agents facing adversities.

All in all, I would like to conclude asserting that I advocate for a school that, looking from the South to the South, fosters the integration of diverse knowledges, challenging the dominant literacy where necessary and embracing a variety of literacies in the classroom. This educational approach to language learning aims to dissolve abyssal lines, contributing to an ecology of knowledges (SANTOS, 2010).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

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