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MACUNÂIMA’S POWER OF DECEIT: A GENRE AND CONTEXT ANALYSIS

O PODER DE ENGANAR DE MACUNÂIMA: UMA ANÁLISE DE GÊNERO TEXTUAL E CONTEXTO DE CULTURA.

Marcia Moura da Silva

ABSTRACT
By analysing a short passage of one of the best known Brazilian books, Macunaíma, by modernist author Mário de Andrade, this paper aims to show the interrelation between genre and context within three social dimensions: social practices, roles prescriptions and rules/resources. The latter is of particular importance for the creation of power and such elements shall demonstrate the power embedded in the genre chosen for this study, namely deceit.

KEYWORDS
Genre; context, Macunaíma, deceit, power.

RESUMO
A partir da análise de uma curta passagem de Macunáima, de Mário de Andrade, o presente artigo tem por objetivo demonstrar a inter-relação entre gênero textual e contexto de cultura a partir de três dimensões sociais: práticas sociais, prescrições de papéis e regras/recursos. Os últimos são particularmente importantes na criação do poder, e procurar-se-á demonstrar com tais elementos, o poder embutido no gênero textual aqui analisado, a saber: o enganar.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Gênero textual, contexto de cultura, Macunaíma, enganar, poder.

Introduction
The proposal of this paper is to present a context and genre analysis of a passage taken from one of the best known books in Brazilian literature, Macunaíma by Mário de Andrade, published in 1928.

I have chosen to work with this book because the analysis of one of Macunaíma’s translations is the subject matter of my MA dissertation and I found Andrade’s work to contain many interesting passages that could be used for this analysis.

Let me briefly explain my choice of title. If readers were asked to describe the main character of Andrade’s novel, Macunaíma himself, using a few adjectives, I am sure that many of these adjectives would recur. Among other things, the hero is lazy, immature, jealous, boastful, envious, vindictive, and deceitful. My decision on directing

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my analysis based on the latter is because I personally find deceit to be one of the strongest of the hero’s trend, and as such I could find fine examples to choose from.

The analysed excerpt was taken from Chapter II, Maioridade (Growing Up2) and is included in the appendix at the end of this article. I have also included the English Translation by E.A. Goodland (1986) as a complement to the original text.

I will base my analysis of genre and context indirectly on Giddens’ theory of structuration (1984), as I will borrow Meurer’s notion of interrelation between genre and context of culture as presented in his “Integrando estudos de géneros textuais ao contexto de cultura (2006), which is partially based on this theory. According to Meurer (p. 166) this interrelation between genre and context of culture happens in the interface of the three social dimensions namely, social practices, roles prescriptions and rules/resources. The latter are of particular interest for me because it is from these two elements that the creation of power derives.

1. Genre and Context

As Meurer (2006:165) points out, nowadays language is no longer studied in isolation and non-verbal elements are just as relevant as language. In this respect, the interest in bringing context into the genre analysis is increasing among language scholars, such as Motta-Roth (2005), Marcuschi (2005), Bazerman (1994), just a few of the names cited by Meurer (idem). Genre and context are social concepts that, together with language, have the important role of explaining social reality. They are, thus, intermeshed in the communicative framework. While genre is important because it is the means by which we can establish how language functions within the social structures, the context in turn is important for its capacity to create meanings.

Although both concepts are widely studied their interrelation is seldom done. In this respect, I find Meurer’s article to be a good attempt towards bridging the gap. But before getting to the interrelation proper I will go through some definitions necessary to get me there.

I shall work my way in towards my ‘power of deceit’ by starting with the smallest unit of the generic structure that triggers interaction, namely, the speech act, as defined by van Leeuwen (1993, p. 195): “The basic unit of generic structure3 is the speech act, that is, the minimum unit that can realize a unit of discursive practice, a move in the interaction. The speech act is also a first example of a unit that can integrate a diversity of linguistic features.”

The author exemplifies his assertion with the speech act of confession ‘I started to cry’. For such speech act to be considered ‘a confession’ we need a combination of linguistic features such as indicative mood; first person; reference to self as theme (up front in the clause); a verb which denotes an action, thought, or feeling considered reprehensible in the given context. If we change any of the features in this combination we also change the nature of the speech act.

2 Goodland’s translation.
3 Described by the author as ‘the syntagmatic structure of discourse, its ‘beginning-middle-end’ structure, which is also, and at the same time, the structure which realizes discourse as social practice, or rather, as part of it, for social practices comprise both discursive and non-discursive elements, both text and context.
For van Leeuwen (1993, p. 197), speech acts group together into stages (the authors indicates that the term is borrowed from Martin⁴), in which the combinations of features remain relatively homogeneous. The author suggests that these stages could be given labels as to indicate their interactive function, e.g. ‘narrative episode’; ‘expository argument’; ‘procedural step’). It is possible to have within this interactive function, ‘inserts’, that is, non-narrative comments or descriptive details in a ‘narrative episode’. The boundaries of the stages are normally marked by a shift in the pattern of the combination; and the intended goal of a particular interaction should be achieved at the final stage so that the text will appear to be complete.

In van Leeuwen (2005, p.128) the author points out that from a social semiotic point of view, genre, instead of the generalized meaning of ‘a type of text’, should be seen as a semiotic resource that can be used in different contexts. Genre, he goes on, are ‘templates’ used on the communicative act. A genre such as the focus of this work, ‘deceit’, for instance, can be applied to many other contents. However, he draws our attention to the fact that genres are culturally and historically specific forms of communication and as such they ‘realize culturally and historically specific power relations between the communicating parties.’ In the specific case of the deceit genre, for instance, it is a form of representing the relation between a ‘naïve’ deceived person and a ‘smart’ deceitful one.

Meurer (2006, p. 166) takes the notion of the interrelation between genre and context of culture partially from Halliday’s Sistemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL), and partially from Gidens’ Theory of Structuration. From SFL, he takes the notion of the context divided into context of situation and context of culture; and from the Theory of Structuration, the notion that the flow of daily life, which includes genre, realizes through three social dimensions: social practices; role prescriptions; and rules and resources. As my interest lies particularly on these three social dimensions, I shall leave SFL out of the scope of this paper.

With regard to social practices, Meurer (2004, p. 88) points out that they are daily social activities realized by the individuals within different contexts. These practices are the link between these individuals and the society. Within these practices, the individual will act in accordance (or not) with certain roles prescriptions, which in turn are connected to social structures⁵ (in the form of rules and resources). Role prescriptions are duties and rights associated with specific social identities. For example, it is expected from a mother to be loving and caring towards her child, that is her duty, but on the other hand, for being the mother she has some privileges such as telling her child off or punishing him with no TV for the whole week or some other thing.

The author also indicates (p.90) that rules are divided into normative and codes of signification; and the resources into allocative and authoritative. The normative aspect of the rules relates to norms (how the individual should act), whereas the codes of signification relate to the meaning individuals attribute to things around them. Both norms and codes of signification have structuring properties, in the sense that they can lead the individual to act in a certain fashion, hence allowing for the production or reproduction of social life.

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⁵ In the Theory of Structuration ‘structure is primarily expressed in the things that people do in a regularized and institutionalised way’ (MEURER, apud GIDDENS and PIERSO N, 1998, p.78).
Resources are necessary for the rules to be realized in a given social practice. Both allocative and authoritative resources, in the theory of structuration, are linked to the creation of power, which, according to Giddens (1984, p.15) ‘is very often defined in terms of intent or the will, as the capacity to achieve desired and intended outcomes.’ For Giddens power is closely related to action and agency. The agent has the means to either act or refrain from acting in the world; and his action will have influence in a given process. Thus the agent, in Giddens’ words, has the capacity ‘to make a difference.’

Let’s now have a look at the two types of resources. Broadly speaking, allocative resources relate to material resources involved in the creation of power, having money, for instance; and authoritative resources relate to non-material resources used in creating power - a person’s capability to do something. For example, a doctor invested with his knowledge of medicine (authoritative resource), and using allocative resources belonging to the hospital (hospital equipment, operating theatre, etc.) can perform a surgery and save someone’s life. Both allocative and authoritative resources invested this doctor with power to save this patient and, therefore, change the course of his life. Meurer (2006, p. 175) suggests that we should go by stages when trying to interrelate genre with the context of culture. Thus, for the interrelation between genre and the normative side of rules he suggests we try to specify how a textualization relates to the norms embedded in the social practice in which the text is used. As for the interrelation between genre and the semantic side of rules, he suggests that we specify the meanings that people attribute to people, things, etc. In order to interrelate genre and issues of power and domination, he suggests we specify the allocative and authoritative resources involved.

In the next section I shall try to demonstrate this interrelation between genre and context of culture in the sample passage from Macunaíma.

2. Analysis

Starting with the analysis of genre, I have divided the passage into speech acts and have given them ‘labels’ in accordance with the functions I believe they carry, loosely based on the definitions presented by van Leeuwen (1993, p. 195).

The extract shows the hero, Macunaíma, wanting to have fun on his brother’s expense. In order to achieve his intent he decides to lie about the existence of timbó, a plant used to fishing due to its narcotic properties (it must be crushed and thrown into the water in order to stupefy the fishes, which will then be easily caught by hand).
### Speech acts

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<td>28. Narrative summary</td>
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</table>

I have grouped together the speech acts into stages and what we can see is that some stages are not typical of the genre deceit, as they could be part of a different genre in a different context of situation. On the other hand, there are stages that need to be present in order for it to be considered such a genre (stages 1, 4, 5 e 11), that is, we must know that someone is going to deceive someone else, why (reason may be only implicit), how he/she is going to do it, and we must have someone falling for the deceit.

Some stages are only present as consequence of others. For instance, there are reassertion and justification stages because the brothers placed doubt in Macunaima’s claims. In the genre deceit, neither a reassertion/justification nor a doubt stage is necessary, as someone can just be deceived straight on, no questions asked.

I have classified speech acts 14 and 15 as a second deceit because I see it as a deceit within a ‘greater’ deceit, which has its on follow up stage (stage 7), but this stage could well be also a complement, part of the ‘guise’.

As for stage 11, I believe that the outcome in favour of the deceitful person is necessary because otherwise we could be talking of an ‘attempt to deceive’ genre instead, although this attempt is part of this particular text and could be considered a genre within the genre deceit.
Turning to context, what we can see here is a social practice that involves three people, all brothers, who were born from the same mother, who lead a life of difficulties, specially in relation to food shortage and are now going together to search for a certain plant, which will enable them to fish. Other practices led the brothers to be where they are such as the brothers denying Macunaíma a piece of the tapir he himself had hunted down, or their eating of the last scraps of meat.

If we talk about norms, we can say that one of the norms involved in this social practice is that of going to a certain spot to look for the plant. For Macunaíma the signification of going to look for this plant is very different from the brother’s. While it means to the brothers a way to get fish to feed the family, for Macunaíma it means he can have some fun on the brother’s expense.

However, as there are many possibilities of different interpretations by the people taking part in the action, the brothers could have decided, for instance, from the first doubt (speech act 4), not to go for the search and change what came next; the same way that Macunaíma could have put an end to it, instead of insisting on his deceit, and equally change the course of the practice. Their choice of action realized the genre deceit.

I see as allocative and authoritative resources the environment, with the forest and the river, sources of the plant and the fishes (including the candiru fishes that attack the brothers) and the deep mud.

Macunaíma is the agent in most of the speech acts, especially on those acts that are part of the stages necessary to realize the deceit genre. He takes a very active role in the deceiving. When doubts are raised by the brothers regarding the existence of the plant, they hold the capacity of changing the course of events and thus are invested with power, but by their inability to realize they are being deceived, they unintentionally help the realization of Macunaíma’s intent. Macunaíma’s ability to persuade the brothers that he is telling the truth is far greater than the brother’s ability to recognize they are being deceived. Macunaíma’s ability to persuade the brothers that he is telling the truth is far greater than the brother’s ability to recognize they are being deceived. Macunaíma is the one who repeatedly tries to regain power, managing quite craftily to do so (stages 3, 6, 9 and 10). As part of Macunaíma’s role prescriptions as the youngest brother (he is addressed as ‘sonny’ and referred to as boy), his duty is that of respecting his older brothers, and as a citizen his duty is that of following the unwritten norm that states that deceiving is morally wrong. On the other hand we could say that he also has the privilege, as a child, to play childish tricks on the brothers.

For me this genre is strongly based on the notion of power, and the sustenance of such power. For being the ones effectively looking for the plant, the ones with capacity to catch the fishes, theoretically the brothers could be the ones holding power. However, Macunaíma is the one who has the knowledge of the non-existence of the plant, the one who knows the search is fruitless, and he is the one who actually has the power to break the rules. He is, in Giddens’ (1984) words, the one who ‘makes a difference’.

Final considerations

By basing my analysis on the interrelation between genre and context of culture as suggested by Meurer (2006), whose elements were briefly discussed herein, I believe I was able to demonstrate that the genre of my choice indeed bears power and, as genres in general, can have ‘variations’ and speech acts which do not belong exclusively to it. I
believe that through the analysis the structuring properties of rules and resources were made clear by showing that the individuals in this particular social practice were both fed from and fed into the social structures.

Bibliographical Reference


Text 1 – Original

1. “Então Macunaíma quis se divertir um pouco.
2. Falou pros manos que inda tinha muita piaba muito jeju muito matrinchão e jatuaranas, todos esses peixes do rio,
3. fossem bater timbó!
5. Macunaíma disfarçando secundou:
6. Junto daquela grota onde tem dinheiro enx erguei um despotismo de timbó.
7. Então venha com a gente pra mostrar onde que é.
8. Foram.
9. A margem estava traçoeira e nem se achava bem o que era terra o que era rio e ntre as mamoranas copadas.
10. Maanape e Jiguê procuravam procuravam, enlameados a té os dentes, degringolando juque! nos barreiros ocultos pela inundação.
11. E pulapulavam se livrando dos buracos, aos berros, com as mãos pra trás por causa dos candirus safadinhos querendo entrar por eles.
12. Macunaíma ria por dentro vendo as micagens dos manos campeando timbó.
13. Fingia campear também mas não dava passo não, bem enxutinho no firme.
14. Quando os manos passavam perto dele, se agachava e gemia de fadiga.
15. Deixe de trabucar assim, piá!
16. Então Macunaíma sentou numa barranca do rio e batendo com os pés n’água espantou os mosquitos.
17. E eram muitos mosquitos piuns maruins arurus tatuquiras muriçocas meruanhas marigüís borrachudos varejas, toda essa mosquitada.
18. Quando foi de-tardezinha os manos vieram buscar Macunaíma tiriricas por não terem topado com nenhum pé de timbó.
19. O herói teve medo e disfarçou:
20. Acharam?
21. Que achamos nada!
22. Timbó já foi gente um dia que nem nós...
23. Presenciou que andavam campeando ele e soverteu.
24. Os manos se admiraram da inteligência do menino e voltaram os três pra maloca.”

Text 2 – Translation by E.A. Goodland

01. Macunaíma chose this time to tease his family.
02. He said there must still be plenty of different kinds of fish in the river,
03. so they ought to go and stupefy them with fish-fuddle, by pounding some sticks of this climbing vine and flogging the water with the frayed pieces.
04. Maanape muttered, “I haven’t seen any fish-fuddle around here lately”.
05. Macunaíma craftily volunteered,
06. “Near that cave where the coins are buried, I’m sure I saw masses of the stuff.”
07. “Then come with us and show us where it is!”
08. Off they went.
09. The banks of the flooded river were treacherous,
10. since they could not easily tell which was land and which was water between the pollarded trees.
11. Maanape and Jiguê searched and searched, up to their eyes in the mud falling down- splash! – into pits hidden by the flood.
12. The brothers leaped, shrieking, out of these holes with their hands clasped over their backsides because of the sneaky candirú fish trying to wriggle their barbed bodies into their arseholes.
13. Macunaíma laughed behind his hand at his brother’s antics as they combed the area for fish-fuddle, and pretended to search too but he never took a step away from his comfortable dry patch.
14. When the brothers came near him he cowered down and whimpered with faked tiredness.
15. “No point killing yourself; you can knock off now, sonny!” they said.
16. So Macunaíma sat on the riverbank, splashing his feet in the water to scare off the mosquitoes.
17. There were millions of mosquitoes large and small, gnats, biting flies, midges, blackflies, sandflies, gadflies, horseflies, bluebottles, blowflies, cockchafers, bugs, ladybirds, pismires and clegs; every kind of stinging and biting insect you can think of.
18. At dusk the brothers were in a nasty mood when they came to fetch Macunaíma, because they hadn’t found a single stick of fish-fuddle, not one.
19. The hero was frightened but had the gall to ask slyly, “Did you find any?”
20. “Not a thing.”
21. “I saw some fish-fuddle. You know, that plant can become human. Perhaps it sensed we were looking for it and hid. After all, once upon a time fish-fuddle was human like us.”
22. The brothers admired the child’s gumption, and the three of them returned to their hut together.”
1. is a machine that generates electricity, steam, gas, etc. 2. A device giving information about position, movement, etc. is named . 3. A machine for changing water and steam power into electrical energy is known as . 4. Food mixers, toasters, modern dish-washers and a number of the most recent home devices are household . 5. An apparatus to increase or decrease the voltage of an electric power supply was invented at the end of the 19th century. 6. It is known that a portable cell for supplying electricity is called