

# POETRY AND ITS LITERARY RESOURCES AS QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

LA POESÍA Y SUS RECURSOS LITERARIOS COMO METODOLOGÍA CUALITATIVA

POESIA E DISPOSITIVOS LITERÁRIOS COMO METODOLOGIA QUALITATIVA

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## ABSTRACT

This article describes the main contributions of poetic inquiry as a critical qualitative methodology for the social sciences and health sciences. Are first explored the present research trends associated with the use of poetry as a narrative construction form; in a second, the use of specific exercises is analyzed to identify the potential of narrative aesthetics in the construction of alternative subjectivities as a way of recognizing the voice of the research participants. Finally, there is an academic and reflective discussion about the need to use this methodology in the different universities and study centers in Latin America. It can be concluded that poetic research is a critical way of approaching community problems based on the voice of its participants. It is also a methodology that unites researchers and their participants in a generative dialogue, which enhances qualitative research.

**Keywords:** Qualitative Research, Poetry as Topic, Social Psychology.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo describe las principales contribuciones de la investigación poética (poetic inquiry), como una metodología cualitativa crítica para las ciencias sociales y ciencias de la salud. Así, en primer lugar, se exploran las principales tendencias de investigación asociadas al uso de la poesía como forma narrativa; en un segundo lugar, se analiza el uso de ejercicios concretos para identificar el potencial de la estética narrativa en la construcción de subjetividades alternativas como una forma de reconocer la voz de los participantes de la investigación. En un tercer lugar, se plantea una discusión académica y reflexiva sobre la necesidad de uso de esta metodología en las diferentes universidades y centros de estudio en Latinoamérica. Se puede

concluir que la investigación poética es una forma crítica de abordar problemáticas comunitarias a partir de la voz de sus participantes. Asimismo, es una metodología que une a los investigadores y sus participantes en un diálogo generativo, que potencia la investigación cualitativa.

**Palabras claves:** Investigación Cualitativa, Poesía como Asunto, Psicología Social.

## RESUMO

Este artigo descreve as principais contribuições da pesquisa poética como uma metodologia qualitativa crítica para ciências sociais e ciências da saúde. Assim, em primeiro lugar, as principais tendências de pesquisa associadas ao uso da poesia como forma narrativa são exploradas; Em segundo lugar, o uso de exercícios específicos é analisado para identificar o potencial da estética narrativa na construção de subjetividades alternativas como forma de reconhecer a voz dos participantes da pesquisa. Em terceiro lugar, há uma discussão acadêmica e reflexiva sobre a necessidade de usar essa metodologia nas diferentes universidades e centros de estudo da América Latina. Pode-se concluir que a pesquisa poética é uma maneira crítica de abordar os problemas da comunidade com base na voz de seus participantes. É também uma metodologia que une pesquisadores e seus participantes em um diálogo generativo, o que melhora a pesquisa qualitativa.

**Palavras-chave:** Pesquisa Qualitativa, Metodologia Qualitativa, Poesia como Assunto, Psicologia Social.

## INTRODUCTION

Remember Jorge Luis Borges, reading again his notes from the lectures at Harvard University, during a course he was invited between 1967 and 1968. The first conference editing the book *Arte Poética*, the enigma of poetry, shows Borges recalling his first meetings with poetry, which causes him this thought:

*When poetry, the language, was not only a means for communication, but it also could be a passion and a pleasure; when I had this revelation, I do not think I understood the words, but I felt something was happening to me. And it did not only affect my intelligence, but my whole being, my flesh and my blood (1).*

In some way poetry connects us to a sensitive which goes beyond the reason of this arbitrariness of language. We are immersed in the charm of the interiority, in the search for the silence caused by words. And this is not a solo or intimate act. As (Octavio) Paz demonstrated, the meeting of poetry is also a social act transforming society at the same time it transforms the subject. In his words:

*A poetry without society would be a poem without an author, a reader, and strictly speaking, without words. The two terms, condemned to a perpetual conjunction that is answered in an immediate argument, look for a mutual conversion: poeticize social life, socializing the word poetic (2).*

The poetry, as a literary genre, has an unusual force in the construction of subjectivity, beyond reflecting on the act of the word in social relationships and day-to-day life. In this sense, and thanks to the contributions of qualitative methodologies, in particular to the contributions of Denzin and Lincoln the use of the methodologies was extended to incorporate a series of narrative strategies yet to be explored to that point (3, 4). Specifically, this stage of rise of new narratives in qualitative research was called by authors post experimental inquiry. At this stage (1995-2000) the need for other narrative forms in qualitative terms, led to the emergence of discursive strategies, such as theater, poetry, performance and all narrative forms, incorporating the voice of the participants and the design of alternative ways to construct the object of analysis and interpretation of research.

From there, the publications that guided this transformation began to become more frequent. For example, Guba & Lincoln's contributions, the analysis of the phenomenon of narrative inquiry in a variety of contexts, as Clandinin explained, the Gergen's reflection in terms of researcher status change under this perspective and relational narrative, in addition to convening the interpretation of social constructionism as an entry point for understanding alternative social sciences and psychology (5 - 12).

On the other hand, poetry took an important place in these

emerging methodologies. In consequence, it can be said poetic inquiry (IP) as the use of poetry as a narrative resource that occurs at some point in the research process. For Prendegast, the use of a poetic way emphasizes three voices: theory voice, researcher voice and participant voice (13). In other words, poetry can be an involved resource in the research process if a reflection on the literary theory is required, as the enunciation of the voice of the researcher and/or as a subjective expression of the study participants. It depends on the intentions of the research to incorporate some of these voices, or even combine them. For Guiney, Wiebe & Faulkner, poetry, a qualitative data generator, makes an explicit connection between poetry and interpersonal relations, opposite to specific meanings (like in the case of one of their most recent research) on women and their role in the family (14). Additionally, this poetic analysis and its subsequent representation, allows to understand how poetry offers an explicit demonstration of individuals who wish to poeticize their daily relational challenges (15 - 17).

The examples derived from the previous paragraph allow us to think of idea of involving poetry as a tool and method - simultaneously -, which builds a language that is both creative and free, which can go beyond the usual interpretations of other instruments such as the interview or focus group.

In short, the experience of poetry as a form of qualitative research allows the construction of subjectivity in the act of writing, mediated by strategies of literary construction. Above all, thanks to this methodological perspective, the subjectivity that must go through the whole process of investigation is powered, a crucial aspect for the role of qualitative researcher (18). In addition to the above, as Faulkner states, the idea of combining the work of a poet-researcher with the artist, allows to have a flexible approach that enhance artistic concentration along with the activity of recognizing the intended research audience, in the specific context of the intentions of reflexivity considered as significant to the purposes of the investigations to be carried out (19).

Although this methodology has focused basically on the construction of paper written poems, or electronically published ones, a particular intention of this article (in addition to sharing the experience as a poet and researcher with the IP) is to have a reflection about the impact IP can have in the digital writing field and its theoretical discussions, digital phenomena such as the online identity, the means evolution, relational poetry and virtual poetry linked to social networks (20 - 43).

Examples of this can be seen in the possibility of performing a transmediation process between the written text and the visual, which allows alternative versions of an initial text (to say something written) that is fed into an interactive version, in which users can make connections and additional comments that the written text does not allow. In the traditional writing, the power of poetic research is fueled by the need to make different versions of an image; in other words, from an initial poem (written by an author) another different person may be

encouraged to write a version that extends, compresses or gives some other developmental path. This strengthens writing and generates processes of collective construction among the participants of an research.

Based on this theoretical briefing, in the following section, some of the creative ways implied in the development of the IP will be discussed, observing its creative and pragmatic implications and, in this way, develop poet researchers' critical potential.

## PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES OF IDENTITY POETRY

After summarizing some of the definitions about poetic research, and understanding all its implications in the field of poetic research, in the following lines some poetic and narrative exercises are described, guiding the reader to identify resources which could complement the impact of the qualitative in the populations with the research field is worked with. Firstly, Faulkner describes in his book "*Poetry as method*, some specific exercises, according to the author, to work out the poetic muscle (44). Faulkner's aim is "to explore the connection between social science and poetry, besides the growing interest in the use of poetry as a form of research, representation, and a qualitative method for qualitative researchers". To achieve this goal, it is necessary the researcher poet be sensitive to the literary and artistic experience, in terms of the construction of possible worlds, mediated by the daydream and transformative power of metaphors while they can have new readings of reality. In addition to these initial conditions, there must be an attitude of a poet in the poet researcher (45). As Borges remembers: "...the poetry is given to the poet. The writer lives, the task of being a poet is not met in certain times. Someone who is a poet is always a poet, and is continually assaulted by poetry" (46). Consequently, at the same time one is sensitive to the experience of the poetry, at the same time research processes are constructed, mediated by the verse as a subjective experience, accompanied by sensitivity and style.

In accordance with that mentioned above, one of the exercises Faulkner proposed is the dramatic monologue. This type of poem is an intimate relationship between voice and representation. It is focused on the characterization of who represents it, refining on facial expressions and moods; the general idea is to relate written poetic expressions with the body and the tone of voice. With the whole body. This type of poetic representation is very useful for describing someone's emotions and feelings who identifies him or herself, or in other terms, who is inserted in a community and wants to express in a critical way problematic situations, fears, discontent with domination processes, poverty, discrimination, among other phenomena.

Another poetic strategy is to create our own poetic form. For Faulkner, "if you are using a poem as a means of data analysis, you can use some specific rules that will help you support this form of expressing the information and its subsequent interpretation". For example, when the title of the poem comes from a song, when the poem can be structured in four stanzas and

each one of them are composed by four verses. A reflection proposed by Faulkner is to identify that poetry is structured in metrics and versification, and this learning can be useful to differentiate the impact a haiku (which is usually made of a stanza of three or four verses as much) can have, opposite to a sonnet, which consists of four stanzas, two quatrains and two trios. Recognizing these structural features of the poem, helps the poet researcher to identify the impact of certain poetic forms over other ones. From this initial knowledge, the variation in a personal way can be more effective, while a very different interpretation is made. In other words, the feeling and interpretation is different if you are reading a free verse poem or a rhyming stanza. For this type of exercise prior appropriation of knowledge on metric versification and structural aspects of classical poetry is required.

Another technique proposed by the author is the found poem. In this variation, a construction of a poem incorporating texts which have not originally been written in a poetic way, but are inserted within the exercise of literary construction is expected. This type of poem, separately equipped with a variety of not originally poetic texts, does not have a literary objective, but poet researcher's intention and textual reconstruction strategies finally transforms the non-poetic sense in one poetic. Writing strategies for a found poem can be varied. For example, verses through the transcripts of the qualitative data collected, interwoven in verses and under a structure (a quatrain or free verse) can be constructed. This, in addition to making explicit the voice of the protagonists of this research, may be accompanied by field notes made by the researcher and even these expressions can be combined after a codification process through a processing software or data mining. Some examples of this type of poetry can be traced in Pendergast, who performs a found poem from the selection published poems in indexed social sciences journals between 2007 and 2012 (47). Constructing exercises on reflective aspects of researchers and their expressions in found poems can be also identified in authors such as Pelias, Leavy and Lapum (48 - 50).

Another technique developed by Faulkner is the so-called three reviews. In this poetic composition, the starting point is a developed poem in the research process and, based on this literary material, three different versions are created, which may vary in terms from the extension of the poem (of one originally written in the form of a quatrain, modifying it and making a short poem), the shape of the poem (if the original was written with an identified poetic voice, as the third person, transforming it to first person poem), to the content of the original poem (perform a critical reading of used words, language turns, their literary figures, textual structure in purposes of carrying out a form and content critical analysis).

The technique of three revisions is based on a fundamental fact: the importance of the revision of the literary text, for the sake of its subsequent publication. It can be said, therefore, that this technique should be used as a shaft that passes through any process of creative writing, because as Cassany stated, it is one of the three axes that accompanies the process of construction of any text (51). For Consul, the writing process,

specially the creative one, must be guided to find design strategies to the text to be written (pre-composition), the writing exercise (composition) and the revision of the text to identify form and content structural aspects that must be reviewed, without forgetting to apply a particular style (if it is scientific texts). In addition to these axes, Cassany warns own experience of writing communities must be included, expressed in specific literacies (both set of discursive and non-discursive practices a particular society have), which allow to understand the logic of each community towards writing process and emotions and feelings expressions through written and visual texts (52).

About the three revisions technique, I propose a technique that could be called as collaborative poem. In this technique, the starting point is the Surrealist principle known as Exquisite Corpse, an experimental form of writing carried out by this critical thinking school, driven by André Breton, who attempted to build literary texts by several hands, often without knowing who wrote, in order to release an unconscious flow through the poetic text (53). According to this historical inspiration, I propose writing a poem by several hands, in groups of three people. I briefly describe the following sequence:

**Collaborative Poem**

(Protagonist 1). Write a verse in each line:

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The protagonist chooses a partner of the three-people group and asks for an answer or continue the idea of the first three opening verses:

(Protagonist 2). Answer or continuation of the three previous verses:

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Protagonist 2 returns the page to Protagonist 1.

(Protagonist 1). Write a verse in each line, after Protagonist 2 writings.

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Protagonist 1 chooses a different partner from Protagonist 2 and asks to answer or continue the idea of the verses above:

(Protagonist 3). Write a verse in each line:

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The collaborative writing, mediated by the verse, is very powerful in the construction of subjective processes in which one can speak of a particular social situation, without the need to be expressed through artificial narrative forms, as the case of a survey or a semi-structured interview would be. The verse is a pretext for the release of emotions, which coupled with the power of the other that accompanies in writing, makes the collective construction more consistent with the senses built in the relational ego (8, 11, 15).

There is an invitation with the proposed exercise to change the way that you can construct qualitative data collection instruments, which developed in a poetic key, transform the usual meaning of the words to literary figures that are often focused on the comparison (as if) and the metaphor (this is something), which without a doubt extends not only the interpretative repertoire of the researcher, but the participant experience, anchored in a much more effective and vital joint participation.

The use of the collaborative poem allows to be complemented by a series of techniques of interpretation of the texts constructed as a whole, as in the case of categorical analysis or narrative analysis, which manage to identify common aspects of constructed narratives. Makes it a very powerful exercise to build the results of the research. In addition, the experience of constructing poetic texts in it implies the opening to new forms of thinking, focused on identifying images and literary resources that appear in the daily life of people, which also drives their creative skills

**IMPACT OF RESEARCH IN THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE**

As it has been demonstrated by Cole, one of the mediated artifacts of the interpersonal relations is, without any doubt, language (54). The power of the transformation of reality is indisputable. In addition to this, social practice becomes the pretext for the study of human activity, in which certain artifacts are more powerful in terms of expressing subjective processes. One of these artifacts is poetry. According to the cultural psychology postulates, this mediation makes possible to study, both macro and to microsocial practices, evolution and transit of the meanings in people’s experience Esteban and Ratner, remind the micro cultural psychology potential, focused on interpersonal relations, which constitutes the bedrock of mind and culture relationship (55). Even authors like Glaveanu proposes

that creativity should be a cultural psychology field of study, so through creativity the dynamics, not only of people who express their feelings and ideas in the art (including poetry) can be understood, but the ways in which communities identify their senses, their interests and their day-to-day concerns can also be recognized (56).

As a result, the contribution of the IP address to the academic and social life, focuses on two major contributions; in the first place, from the researcher's point of view, the permanent use of instruments of qualitative data collection as the interview and focus group is decentered, even the in-depth interview. I also think, even in life stories. While there is no doubt that these instruments are very important in the qualitative methodologies, the tendency to its overuse can sometimes deprive in the experience of the researcher the ability to listen to and understand other relationship dynamics of the people he or she works with. It also removes the researcher of the possibility to be thought as the person who creates, intervenes or, in other words, who is committed to a significant extent in the research process. Poetry allows the researcher poet has a dual commitment with his or her own experience of scripture, which should lead him or her to a systematic study of the poetic creation, its technical resources and the great poets, according to specific interests. The other commitment is the possibility to make the connection between these literary knowledge and purpose of research it is searched for. In other words, there should be a correspondence between the world of poetry, in terms of the construction of possible worlds in the writing and the academic world, powering the meanings about the world of relationships and communities.

Secondly, the contributions are directed to the protagonists of the research processes. This is an invitation this methodology makes to incorporate poetry in the daily life as a fundamental part of existence as well as to promote awareness of the aesthetic in the daily acts, in everyday life. It is also an invitation to rescue the voice of the protagonist without limitation: find an own voice, which is not mediated nor limited by the voice of the researcher. As Vasilachis recalls the epistemology of the subject known, without eclipse, arrange or subdue to the epistemology of the cognoscente subject should be promoted in the qualitative methodologies (57). Thus, in addition to the sensitivity and recognition of the voice of the protagonist, the poetic research exalts the subjectivity, a crucial aspect in the impact of qualitative methodologies, in general, for the understanding of the social life. It is expected that these contributions of the theorists of the IP can be seen reflected in the construction of research

projects, in which poetry is a key component, in any part of the development process and, why not, in the generation of scientific articles taking into account both the protagonists of research and their poet researchers' experience.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

To retake Borges's words about the impact of metaphors in the field of poetry, he affirms that in terms of themes, the list of which they are summoned is not very long: love, revenge, dream and out of love. The important thing beyond the themes is the way they are stated. The variety with which language can say, transforming the subjectivities and emotions of love, revenge, dream and out of love. In other words, it is necessary to make language a canvas to be able to always affirm these themes of the human condition, with different words, with alternative literary turns.

In this sense, it opens a series of possibilities of study and understanding of the impact that poetry can have in the field of research for our Latin American countries. I describe three. The first is the importance in daring to create new forms of construction of reality, mediated in the verse, as a way of studying social realities that may be sensitive to its participants. The second impact has to do with the possibility of expanding the creative and playful competences of research participants, mediated in literary creation. This aspect can be strengthened, and it is my bet of this text, with the integration of poetry, technology and qualitative research as the axes of a revolution in the way research is done in Latin America. The third impact is to promote the cognitive sensitivities and the self-reflection of the researcher, transforming him into an actor with critical force to interpret reality from interdisciplinary scenarios, as Faulkner states in all his work, the power of IP should be reflected in a series of creative and literary capacities in the researcher himself. In other words, think of the verse, be a poet and poetresearcher, the great challenges that IP offers us.

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