MC Battles: a study on (im)politeness and axiological categorization under the light of pragmatics

Batalhas de MC: um estudo sobre (im)polidez e categorização axiológica à luz da pragmática

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Abstract: MC battles are part of a long oral and musical tradition of the African American and Latino community. In this paper, we intend to analyze the battle punch lines under he light of the theory of linguistic impoliteness (CULPEPER, 2005, 2011; CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017), as well as the notion of axiological categorization (ASSIMAKOPOULOS *et al*., 2017, EVANS, 2009), situating them as rituals of violence and verbal dispute (BERTUCCI; BOYER, 2013; MOÏSE, 2011; VETTORATO, 2008). The punch lines analyzed were taken from contests that are released to the general public. The results show that the punch lines are characterized by the use of *ad hoc* strategies of negative and positive impoliteness, together with axiological categorization, and contempt for the rival.

Keywords: MC battles; impoliteness; cognitive categorization; pragmatics.

Resumo: As batalhas de MC fazem parte da tradição oral e musical da comunidade afro-americana e latina. Neste estudo, pretende-se analisar os versos de arremate (*punchlines*) das batalhas de um ponto de vista pragmático, ligado à teoria da (im) polidez linguística (CULPEPER, 2005, 2011; CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017), à

noção da categorização axiológica (ASSIMAKOPOULOS *et al*., 2017, EVANS, 2009), situando-as como rituais de violência e de disputa verbais (BERTUCCI; BOYER, 2013; MOÏSE, 2011; VETTORATO, 2008). As *punchlines* analisadas foram retiradas de competições divulgadas para o grande público. Os resultados demonstram que esses versos são caracterizados pelo emprego de estratégias *ad hoc* de (im)polidez negativa e positiva, juntamente com a intensificação de elementos de categorização axiológica e pelo desprezo ao rival.

Palavras-chave: batalhas de MC; (im)polidez; categorização cognitiva; pragmática.

1 General presentation of the study

The verbal disputes marked by violence, according to Vettorato (2008), are historical, that is, they have been present in different eras and cultures, presenting recurrences in form and style. If, on the one hand, they bring into play the excellence of the speakers in dispute, on the other, they play an important role in denouncing and building identities. The hip-hop phenomenon*,* for example, appears as a form of denunciation against unemployment, racism, poverty and urban violence in the United States. It consists of four pillars, the work of MCs, the work of disk jockeys (DJs), dance in the break style, and graffiti, as described by Cutler 1999), Chang (2005) and Rose (2008).

In these cultural manifestations, MC battles function as competitions in which MCs compete with each other in the form of raps, or free-style verses. The goal of the duel is for each opponent to argue about the topics discussed, which is usually done by exchanging offenses, or direct criticism of the rival and his arguments. Participants are aware that they participate in a game in which verbal attacks with an offensive character are the rule. Since these attacks are anticipated by the battle, the opponent is not expected to be offended, but to know how to counterattack. That said, it is worth reflecting on the extent to which the violent attacks of MC battles and their disqualifying character constitute impoliteness.

Due to the combative nature of these interactions and taking into account the established question, this article aims to analyze MC

battles from a pragmatic point of view that seeks to align: (a) the Theory of Linguistic Impoliteness (CULPEPER, 2005, 2011; CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017) in dialogue with studies on verbal battles and (b) the notion of cognitive categorization and axiology (ASSIMAKOPOULOS *et al.*, 2014; EVANS, 2009). In this text, these two concepts were combined in a proposal for axiological cognitive categorization. The reason for this proposal is that the cognitive categories with which we interpret the world (EVANS, 2009) constitute the basis for the formation of the concepts and values with which we evaluate our experiences, being, therefore, axiological cognitive categories (ASSIMAKOPOULOS *et al*., 2017; MAZZARA, 1997). Given this assumption, the paper seeks to investigate the aggressive character of the verses, observing them in the context of the verbal dispute foreseen for this type of interaction.

The verses analyzed in this study were extracted from YouTube videos, in which the competitions are disclosed to the general public. In most of these videos, the most acclaimed rhymes are subtitled, which allows greater authenticity to the data collection, mainly because the high speed of the speeches is intrinsic to this ritual modality.

We are aware that those who post their manifestations in virtual environments, such as YouTube, should be aware of the public character of these environments and, as Graham and Hardaker (2017) have already observed, these people cannot expect this material to not be examined or analyzed by scientific studies. However, we take care to preserve the participants' identity. The MC producing the verses under analysis was called MC King to avoid exposure, as the themes dealt with are sensitive. In addition, the explanation of artistic identity, in itself, is not considered a relevant factor for the analysis undertaken in the study.

Below, a brief overview of MC battles and hip-hop in general will be presented, with emphasis on the aspects that are most interesting to this study, such as axiological categorization. In addition to this initial general presentation and final considerations, the work is organized in four parts, namely: first, we situate MC battles in the context of axiology and cognitive categorization; then, we briefly present some concepts related to impoliteness, articulating them to issues related to verbal dispute games; later, we describe the collection procedures and the analytical categories; then we present the analyses.

2 MC battles in hip-hop culture: axiology and cognitive categorization

Master of Ceremonies (MC) battles are part of a long oral and musical tradition of the African American and Latin community. They are related to other types of ritual insults, recorded, among others, by Labov (1972) and Cutler (1999). More specifically, the battles have their origin commonly associated with the Bronx neighborhood (New York), from where they achieved global reach, including their spread among rappers.

Currently, the Internet increasingly facilitates the interaction of hip-hop producers and consumers and contributes to promote and disseminate expressive and consumption patterns linked to this culture (MATTAR, 2003). In addition, the hip-hop community shares and disseminates, on the Internet, a feeling of marginality and resistance to oppression (OSUMARE, 2007). In this sense, the term "politically conscious rap" (ROTH-GORDON, 2009, p. 64) characterizes a type of rap that confronts the structural violence exercised by specific groups of power.

From the point of view of poetic construction, each spontaneous rhyme of a battle contains punch lines, which must be formulated in less than a minute. The dispute is held in two initial rounds, after the draw of who will attack first. In these rounds, each opponent produces, in general, five free verses. The winner is chosen by acclamation. When the duel ends in a tie, a third round is triggered, in an even more dynamic and fast format, as in a "roundabout." In this tiebreaker, each MC can attack and respond, normally, four times.

The rhymes are formulated according to the beats provided by the DJ, but can sometimes also occur in the chapel. In this scenario, the most talented MCs are able to spontaneously create verses related to the hip-hop culture, the social context, as well as aspects that insult the opponent's appearance, personality, or reputation. In the perspective of this study, these elements of social and cultural affirmation originate in models activated via axiological cognitive categorization. The axiological sense is taken here at a theoretical-practical level, that is, linked to the nature and essence of values, considered as inseparable from the human condition in the various fields of its performance, such as education, art and the world of work (FRONDIZI, 1977). Axiological categorization is therefore cognitive, in the sense that it is configured in a basic cognitive process.

In this sense, the axiological categorization process allows for the recognition and assessment of reality through the grouping of entities, to which certain values or specific qualities are attributed. The phenomenon

commonly occurs in association with criteria of belonging, generally quite broad and often also diffuse (COHEN; LEFEBVRE, 2005). Thus, cognitive categories in general and axiological characterization in particular may exhibit different degrees of centrality, encompassing some members that are more similar than others, as opposed to sharing a single defining characteristic (EVANS, 2009).

Therefore, axiological categorization is often based on pre-established characteristics, considered common to a certain social group, for example, nationality, gender, age, skin color, religion and sexual and/or ideological orientation. These characteristics also play a fundamental role in the stereotyped modeling process, which can also give rise to prejudice and discrimination (MAZZARA, 1997).

From the discursive point of view, the attempt to create idealized models can produce linguistic mechanisms of contrast, or verbal confrontation, in which individuals with characteristics considered similar and, at the same time, evaluated evaluated as incompatible with the worldview of others (their rivals), who are insulted and disqualified. In such cases, an opposition is established, which vilifies the other, denying him human characteristics, among them, in some cases, the right to honor itself (HAUGH, 2017). Thus, when an axiological categorization strategy is discursively materialized, only the group considered "favorable" or "superior" is seen as having intelligence and prestige.

In the field of MC battles, combative stance is crucial. It is all the more valued the greater the intensity of the verbal attack. In example (1), the friendly behavior (Best friend) that the MC suggests as being the expectation of his opponent, is incompatible with the battlefield (Battlefront) where the MCs must act. Example (1), taken from the data of this study, illustrates the use of a linguistic-cognitive attack strategy, which vilifies the opponent, categorized as not deserving of belonging to the hip-hop community, unlike the speaker, who imposes himself as someone prepared for the tough fight:

(1)　Vim aqui para a Battlefront
　　　e não para ser seu Best Friend

　　　I came here to Battlefront
　　　and not to be your Best Friend

The punch line of (1) attributes elements of the war field to the MC battle and establishes the rapper as a combatant, that is, a soldier on the front line (battlefront). This categorization of the conflict event implies the identification of a potential rival that, in Example 1, is built by the opposition between enemy (in battle) and best friend. To do this, the rival is expressly categorized as an enemy on the punch line. It is also imputed to him the mistaken expectation of a friendly environment for confrontation, something incompatible with the essence of battles between rappers. This puts the opponent's belonging to the group under strong suspicion, affecting its positive face (BROWN; LEVINSON, 1987) and, at the same time, polarizing the axiological confrontation between the "good" and "bad" hip-hop fighters. We can affirm that, by placing the opponent in the category of "bad fighter," by suggesting that he can be a "Best Friend," the rapper disparages the opponent's position, disqualifying him.

Still in this example, with respect to linguistic strategies of political-ideological polarization, the study by Wirth-Koliba (2016), carried out with data from political campaigns in the United Kingdom, showed how the discursive proximity strategies (VAN DIJK, 1997) can be effective in building the relationship between the "us" and "them" fields. Used as a pragmatic-cognitive resource linked to the speaker's ability to present events that directly affect rivals, usually in a negative way, or threatening their reputation, these strategies tend to reverberate more strongly in speeches about threats of delegitimization, for example, linked to immigration and government exclusion policies. In the perspective of the study by Wirth-Koliba (2016), the deictic center of political discourse in Great Britain included, for example, at the time of data collection, a polarization between immigrants ("they") and the politicians of the British National Party ("we"). The use of these discursive elements, according to the author, serves to demarcate the creation of deictic centers of polarized linguistic action. In this study, this type of polarization was also identified, as will be seen in the analysis chapter. Next, we turn to a discussion of aspects related to the Theory of Linguistic Impoliteness, which support this research.

3 Face work, linguistic (im)politeness, and verbal battles

In the perspective of Goffman (1973), the face work refers to the linguistic and non-linguistic actions performed by the participants

to "claim their social values, or to maintain their self-image in a way considered satisfactory for the interaction" (HAUGH, 2013, p. 65). The concept of territory, also linked to the concept of face, refers to both the physical and the personal territory, as well as the individual's psychological space, as well as parts of the body, clothing and personal objects (GOFFMAN, 1973). The idea of territory comprises the reserved domains of interaction, that is, the individual's right to control who can start the turn, as well as the right to protect himself from other people's intrusion and indiscretion (GOFFMAN, 1973).

When revisiting the work of Goffman (1973), Brown and Levinson (1987) revised the notion of face and proposed an important concept: the Face Threatening Acts (FTA). FTAs are classified according to the type of face threatened (positive or negative) and the fact that the threat is issued against the listener, or against the speaker (BROWN; LEVINSON, 1987). Thus, requests of any order, for example, can threaten the listener's negative face. If refused, requests or offers can also threaten the positive face of the requester, or the offeror. In the same direction, criticism generally attacks the listener's positive face. Likewise, thanks and praise can threaten the negative face of the speaker, as they imprint on the speech act the notion of a debt to be recognized. Specifically regarding the concept of politeness, Leech (1983) elaborates it as a type of restriction on human behavior, operating to avoid disagreement or offense, as well as allowing the harmonic flow of the interaction. Disharmonious situations, in which impoliteness is the norm, occur in some particular contexts, in which insults are frequent (OLIVEIRA; CARNEIRO, 2018).

An attack on the face can simply be ignored and not responded to. If answered, there are choices on how to respond. The choice tends to be between accepting rudeness or counterattacking. Acceptance involves agreeing with an insult; the counterattack involves responding directly to the rudeness. One can also simply be silent, accept the offense, or defend oneself. According to Bousfield (2008, p. 72), impoliteness is the intentional communication of conflicting and unjustified acts, purposely carried out: (a) in an unmitigated way and (b) with deliberate aggression. In the specific case of this study, the attack is expected to be answered by counterattack, as observed at the beginning of this work.

In a perspective similar to Bousfield's pointed out in the previous paragraph, Culpeper (2005, 2011) and Culpeper and Hardaker (2017)

evaluate that impoliteness occurs when: (1) the speaker intentionally communicates the attack on the face, or (2) the listener perceives the behavior as intentional, or even when a combination of (1) and (2) occurs. For Culpeper and Hardaker (2017), it is a cognitive phenomenon, systematized from communication, evaluation and expectations units that establish experiences of (im)politeness. Because of this, linguistic achievements are not inherently 'impolite' or 'polite', but are emerging in particular socio-cultural contexts. (Im)politeness is therefore conceptualized differently in different situations and cultures.

Although (impoliteness) is a cultural phenomenon, we remember, with Cabral (2019), that all cultures contemplate behaviors that, in certain situations, are assessed as impolite. For Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2014), verbal acts that violate social norms constitute impoliteness, even if they are intentional. As for Culpeper (2011), all impoliteness brings an intention. In this sense, Cabral and Lima (2017) argue that violence is an effective strategy when the objective is to offend the interlocutor. Moïse (2011) has a similar interpretation. In the same direction, Laforest and Moïse (2013) emphasize that a fundamental fact for the insult to work is the interlocutor's perception, that is, the insult must have an effect on the other that destabilizes him, that is, it only occurs if the other feels offended. We agree with these authors with regard to both the intentional character of violence and the importance of the interlocutor's perception of that intention. In the specific case of our analyses, however, it is worth mentioning that the destabilizing effect of the other constitutes a way of overcoming the opponent, that is, the rapper who, perhaps, is offended by the opponent's manifestations, demonstrates not maintaining the game.

Also with respect to the relationship between impoliteness, insult and emotions, we highlight the positions of the authors mentioned in the previous paragraph. Moïse (2011) considers insult as an interlocutive act endowed with emotional force, whose purpose is to disqualify, and highlights the importance of markers as the negative axiological value of certain lexemes. Culpeper (2005, 2011), in turn, argues that impoliteness is related to negative emotions and loss of face. We can say that common descriptors of attitudes involving impoliteness and insult are: shame, humiliation, anger, feeling hurt, sad or upset (CULPEPER, 2005, 2011; CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017). Impoliteness acts can therefore occur directly (bald on record), in which the face threat is made directly, clearly, unambiguously and concisely; or indirect (off record), in which

the threatening acts are performed by means of an implicature, but in such a way that a given attributed intention clearly surpasses any other (reprehensible humor).

In these acts, positive impoliteness refers to the use of threatening strategies on the positive side, that is, the interlocutor's desires, such as ignoring, excluding, using disinterest marks, lack of consideration, using secret or obscure language, looking for the conflict, use taboo words, curse. Complementing the notion of positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness consists of strategies designed to damage the negative face of the other. It is linked to the use of language aimed at threatening, showing superiority, despising, ridiculing, being contemptuous, not taking the other seriously, disparaging the other, invading the other's space (literally or metaphorically), as well as associating the other with explicitly negative aspects, or with a single negative aspect (for example, by the marked use of the pronouns "I" and "You" when indicative of conflicting polarization), to highlight the other's debt (CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017). Linked to this pronominal and identity opposition, there is also the struggle between "We" and "They," which is associated with the concept of hegemony (WIRTH-KOLIBA, 2016). In this perspective, the superiority of someone, or of a group over the others, implies the inferiority of the latter, whose reputation is usually denigrated through allegedly impolite acts.

Specifically in relation to the offense, Haugh (2013) suggests that "offense can be understood as a social action initiated by the recipient in which he interprets the actions or conduct of the interlocutor (or any other person or groups of people) as offensive" (HAUGH, 2013). For the author, it is a pragmatic act designed and also limited by the type of activity in which it arises. An important issue noted by Cabral and Albert (2017, p. 278) is that verbal violence constitutes "a moral and social transgression that systematically leads to the devaluation of the other."

In a complementary perspective, Terkourafi (2008) distinguishes impoliteness from rudeness (discourtesy). According to the author, in impoliteness (or rudeness) the speaker has the deliberate intention of threatening the face. In rudeness (or discourtesy), the speaker does not have this deliberate intention. The distinctions proposed by Terkourafi (2008) refer us to the importance of the announcer's intentions, already highlighted by Culpeper (2011) and taken up by Cabral (2019), who, analyzing violent verbal interactions, highlights the importance of

intentionality as a fundamental concept for this type of analysis. In this regard, it is important to return to Terkourafi (2008) for whom a verbal manifestation of violence may have behind him the intention of building his own image, being able to operate, for example, to project a player as an expert, as occurs in verbal battles.

We remember, with Moïse (2011, p. 29), that language can serve "to a desire for transgression, and the feeling of vulgarity, aggressiveness or rudeness often rests on shocking and misaligned forms in relation to the expected social codes."

During adolescence, but not only, verbal dispute rituals involving violence of different orders are quite common. For Moïse (2011), it is a process of construction of their own identity, which allows young people to distinguish themselves from adults, in whom, according to the author, such insulting verbal battles usually arouse reactions of strangeness and malaise, including rejection. According to Vettorato (2008), verbal battles do not oppose social rivals, nor do they have the express objective of insulting, they oppose pairs that find in language a space of accomplice confrontation. The author notes that, if initially they were a form of struggle for supremacy and a culture of survival in a hostile environment, they have now become a culture of competition. According to the author, this is a means of integrating into the community, which shifted the focus to the aesthetic qualities of the performance of each participant in the battle and transformed verbal battles into an art.

With respect to verbal disputes marked by insults among adolescents, Moïse (2011) notes that they deal efficiently with different pragmatic uses, from the expletive to the insult. The author teaches that they play with these uses, provoke and even try to deceive adults, who, as already mentioned, usually clash with this type of verbal behavior by young people. Bertucci and Boyer (2013), in a study on verbal battles among adolescents, note that an important stage in the formation of young people is learning to preserve the face during these verbal battles. The authors state that this learning is possible because a principle of symbolic distance underlies these disputes that authorizes mockery and even insult, without any offensive consequences; there is, as the authors point out, a playful character that endorses the use of verbal violence. In the punch lines analyzed in this study, for example, deliberate impoliteness is the norm, as MCs are engaged in an open verbal battle.

Cabral and Lima (2018), in a study on Facebook posts associated with female violence, identified these categories related to verbal abuse:

(a) direct disqualification focused on the other (negative evaluation by the producer of the initial contribution);

(b) direct disqualification focused on the object (negative feedback reactive to the topic under discussion);

(c) direct disqualification focused on the arguments (reactive negative comment regarding the other's arguments);

(d) co-constructed indirect disqualification (reactive comment of negative evaluation by the producer of the initial contribution by exposing a state/ feeling relative to the producer of the comment);

(e) deviant indirect disqualification (reactive comment used by the user to introduce another topic of interest).

The authors warn that this categorical description may vary according to the corpus, serving as a broad reference for analysis. In this study, these categories were revisited to adapt to the data analyzed here, as will be seen below. In the next section, the data collection and analysis procedures for this study are described.

4 Description of data collection and analysis procedures

The punch lines analyzed in this study were extracted from YouTube videos (https://www.youtube.com/), in which MC battles are disseminated to the general public. These videos have free and unrestricted access and were collected in the month of October 2019. In most of these recordings, the most acclaimed punch lines are subtitled, which contributes to greater accuracy in data collection. This is because the high speed of the MCs' speeches, characteristic of this artistic modality, sometimes prevents the legibility of the verses, especially for those groups that do not belong to the hip-hop universe.

In this study, the MC producing the verses under analysis was called MC King, so that his artistic identity was not disclosed. As this information is not relevant to the study, we chose to omit it. Moreover, the elements of disqualification of the opponent identified may contain elements sensitive to the artists whose productions were analyzed in this study. He is an artist who emerged in the hip-hop universe in 2019,

revered by the rapper community. In the analysis section, MC King is identified as an announcer, as he produces the verses in focus in this research. As already explained and justified in the first section of this work, the names of the rivals were also changed so that their identity was equally preserved. In total, ten punch lines were analyzed, selected in the sequence in which they were published in the video of the most acclaimed punch lines of 2019.

Following data extraction, an interpretative analysis of ten punch lines was carried out, based mainly on the theory of impoliteness and the axiological categorization, as indicated in the theoretical review section of this study. More particularly, the punch lines analyzed were grouped by themes and by the use of different impoliteness strategies that were more prominent in the data.

In addition to this procedure, the categories related to verbal offense, proposed by Cabral and Lima (2018) for the analysis of Facebook comments, were adapted to serve the purposes of this study, linked to the poetic dispute between rivals in the hip-hop universe. After this adaptation, the following categories were used in the data analysis: (a) Direct disqualification focused on the rival; (b) Direct disqualification focused on the topic introduced by the rival and (c) Direct disqualification focused on the rival's verses. Next, we move on to the punch lines analysis.

5   Punch lines analysis using elements of axiological categorization and impoliteness

In the analyzed punch lines, extracted from the most acclaimed MC King verses in 2019, the use of axiological categorization strategies is registered; one of them, considered relevant, is linked to the delimitation of the identity space corresponding to "We" and "They." This opposition serves to demarcate hegemony in the power struggle, as also identified by Wirth-Koliba (2016) with respect to British political discourse. Through axiological categorization, the speaker seeks to emphasize his superiority as a poet, while generating the implicature of the opponent's artistic inferiority, whose reputation is denigrated by the attack on his positive face (BROWN; LEVINSON, 1987). The following excerpts allow us to observe the phenomenon:

(2)   Você falou de poesia, hoje eu te mato, isso é verídico,

          Não é poesia, é poema. Você é ruim, "eu lírico

          You spoke of poetry, today I kill you, that's final,

          It is not poetry, it is poem. You are bad, me lyrical

(3)   Mas, por favor, a minha rima que veja,

          Você bebe tanto que, se fosse uma revista, is ser CerVeja

          But, please, my rhyme you seek,

          You drink so much that if you were a magazine, it would be Beersweek

(4)   Por isso que eu rimo, sua rima é fossea, não seria MC de postura,

          Nem com transplante de medula óssea

          That's why I laugh, your rhyme is irritant, wouldn't be an MC of attitude,

          Not even with a bone marrow transplant

In (2), there is the disqualification of the opponent produced through a strategy of direct disqualification focused on the rival, a phenomenon already analyzed by Cabral and Lima (2018); in the case under analysis, a negative evaluation of the opponent is found, expressed by the opposition "You are bad, me lyrical," which, in addition to disqualifying the opponent through an axiological qualifier, praises the speaker's poetic verve.

The disqualification of the opponent's reputation is also identified in (4), in which the rival is characterized, indirectly, as an alcoholic: You drink so much that if you were a magazine, it would be Beersweek. "Drink so much" is an alcoholic's attribute. Additionally, note the direct disqualification strategy focused on the rival's verses, which occurred through the formulation of a negative evaluation verse in relation to the opponent's rhyme, as he disqualifies the rival's rhyme, the speaker does so through transitivity: if the focus of the verbal battle is the poetic expertise of the rappers in dispute, the one whose rhyme is "irritant" does not have the poetic talent. Used in combination, these two strategies (direct disqualification focused on the rival and direct disqualification focused on the rival's verses) contribute to strengthening the process of axiological categorization, based on the delimitation of considered characteristics common to a particular social group, or individual, in direct opposition

to another. This phenomenon also underlies the formation of stereotypes, which function as categorizations of human experience in a broad and unrestricted sense (EVANS, 2009; MAZZARA, 1997).

Similarly, in (4), one also operates to denigrate the opponent's artistic reputation (his rhyme is irritant), playing an important role in the stereotyped modeling process (MAZZARA, 1997). The verse again delimits the boundary between those who present artistic quality and those who do not. This procedure also refers to the concept of diffuse cognitive categories and reaffirms the radial character of the categorization, which can include more central elements (or attributes) (for example, lyricism, through the production of melodies, or rhymes), as well as more peripheral ones (for example, posture, or a rapper attitude), as opposed to identifying a single characteristic as defining the category (EVANS, 2009).

In excerpt (5), the main resource employed is the direct disqualification focused on the theme introduced by the rival (cf. CABRAL; LIMA, 2018), as it presents a negative assessment of the topic under discussion, introduced by the opponent.

> (5) Você falou de Viagra, só que seu verso é infértil
>
> É que se rap é dar prazer, você tem disfunção erétil
>
> You spoke of Viagra, but your verse is sterile
>
> Because rap is about pleasure, your dysfunction is erectile

In addition, in (5), the rival is attacked in its reputation. In this case, the attack is made directly through the male stereotype of sexuality of sexual potency ("your dysfunction is erectile"). It can be said that the speaker uses the theme proposed by the opponent, in order to build disqualification from it. At the same time, the reinforcement of the idealized male model occurs side by side with the use of diffuse criteria of belonging to a group (COHEN; LEFEBVRE, 2005), supposedly involved in hip-hop culture in general and rap in particular ("but your verse is sterile").

The aspect of masculinity and strength is also evidenced in another excerpt, (6), in which the idealized male image is inserted in the clash, in the form of an artistic success index, when stating "first because I am a man":

(6)   Não quero apagar sua história, primeiro que eu sou homem

E sei da minha trajetória

I don't want to erase your story, first because I'm a man

And I know my trajectory

In (6), the punch line produces a derogatory and unmitigated effect in relation to the opponent, with a verse formulated to contain offensive potential (HAUGH, 2013).

The theme of violence and oppression is recurrent in the verses, which associate social injustice and violence with hip-hop culture, typically identified as a form of resistance, or social denunciation. This aspect can be identified in excerpt (7), in which elements belonging to the belligerent universe are referenced, such as the term Glock, which alludes to an automatic pistol brand. The term also alludes to force as an element of opposition to intelligence, implicitly denouncing the superiority of violence in the social clash (*Intelligence does not beat a Glock at the waist*).

7)   Inteligência não ganha de uma Glock na cintura, seu Lok,

Black Recayd Mod, "Não mexa com a minha Glock"

Intelligence doesn't beat a Glock at the waist, you Lok,

Black Recayd Mod, "Don't mess with my Glock"

The verse still contains the strategy of disqualification of the theme introduced by the rival, since the topic of rationality, or intelligence, is put into dispute by the speaker.

In (8), the theme of violence is again inserted in the combat, along with the affirmation of the speaker's superiority.

(8)   No rap eu trouxe a arte da guerra numa altura tão hostil

Que fiz Sun Tzu virar literatura infantil

In rap I brought the art of war to such a hostile stature

That it made Sun Tzu become children's literature

The strategy of enhancing hostility associating her the superiority of the speaker is identified as direct rival disuqlaification (cf. CABRAL;

LIMA, 2018); through it, the verse attacks the opponent's reputation by asserting the speaker's superiority.

The speaker's reputation is also constituted by the valorization of attributes linked to the aggressive pattern typical of battles. This pattern is contrasted with the alleged naive content of children's literature ("That made Sun Tzu become children's literature"), causing a debauchery, or mockery, effect that hits the opponent. This aspect highlights the intensification of the values debated in the battle and its resulting polarization, derived from processes of axiological categorization. This is because the categorization is based on pre-established characteristics, which are, at the same time, based on diffuse criteria (belligerence vs. naivety). In this direction, the strategy of negative impoliteness contributes to attack the negative face of the other, as predicted. Through the use of language designed to show the speaker's superiority, the rival's psychological space is invaded and he is ridiculed, or becomes the target of mockery (CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017).

The excerpt presented below also alludes to violence and combat, through opposition to a family and politically pacified universe, in which young people are supported by their parents.

> (9)   Sustentado pelo pais, aí você erra,
>
>   Rimando eu trouxe, irmão, a arte da guerra
>
>   Supported by the parents, that is your mistake
>
>   Rhyming I brought, bro, the art of war I make

In (9), the opponent's characteristics are disqualified; he is "Supported by the parents," and, consequently, the opponent himself is directly disqualified "that is your mistake," which serves to affirm the speaker's superiority as an authoritative MC again. This categorization also acts to reinforce the production of the model built by various implicit indications, for example, economic independence from the family. It also contributes to the formation of this model, or category, an imaginary of the struggle for survival, the outcome of which is artistic success as a way of economic independence and social prestige (Rhyming I brought, bro, the art of war I make). It should be noted that the punch line also represents an instance of linguistic impoliteness, constituted by the intentional communication of a conflictive act, purposely performed in a non-mitigated way (BOUSFIELD, 2008).

The racial issue also marks the analyzed punch lines and acts to affirm belonging to a group. In excerpt (10), the opposition between "me" and "other" is used to demarcate a space of racial awareness, which acts as a marker of the hip-hop culture itself.

(10) Mas você veio de preto, eu sou black desde o ventre

Tou mais black do que nunca e você menos MC Leo do que sempre

But you came in black, I'm black from the womb

I'm blacker than ever, you're as good as a bomb

In (10), the announcer affirms his superiority, this time, through racial pride ("I am black from the womb"). Being "black from the womb" also implies the opposition between black origin and appearance, or superficiality, concerning the opponent, who is only *dressed in black*. By using resources linked to negative impoliteness, the punch line acts to damage the opponent's negative face and to enhance his own reputation ("I'm blacker than ever, you're as good a bomb"). This procedure distances the opponent from the battles and includes the speaker.

A strategy similar to this is identified in the excerpt presented below, in which sarcasm (CULPEPER, 2005, 2011) is used as a meta-strategy for impoliteness ("My Bro is good at building"), which also acts as a resource to belittle the rival. In this example, the term "chatter" indicates the fruitful production of verses, characteristic of prestigious artists in rap.

(11) O My Bro é bom na construção,

chegou contra o King e falou de litrão

My Bro is good at the building matter,

came up against King and chatter

In this example (11), impoliteness is instantiated through communication, evaluation and expectations units that establish insulting experiences, strategies already highlighted by Culpeper and Hardaker (2017).

Considering the set of analyses presented, it is worth noting that linguistic achievements are not inherently 'impolite' or 'polite' *per se*, but emerging in particular socio-cultural contexts, in this case, an MC battle. The phenomenon of (im)politeness is, therefore, conceptualized

differently in different situations and cultures. These language practices designed to affect the opponent fulfill the role of attesting the supremacy of the participant and are predicted by the game. Therefore, it can be inferred that, as we have exposed throughout this work, they follow pre-established rules, which organize exchanges between peers, assuming a certain connivance between the participants. The disqualifying character towards the opponent leaves, however, a certain ambivalence in the air: is it just a verbal game, or is it also a means of fighting the other and imposing yourself as the best poet?

After analyzing the punch lines presented here, we move on to the final considerations of the study.

6 Final considerations

This study presented an analysis of the most acclaimed punch lines in 2019, formulated by MC King until October of that year. This analysis was carried out mainly through two complementary theoretical references, linked to Linguistic Pragmatics: the theory of linguistic impoliteness (CULPEPER, 2005, 2011; CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017) and the notion of axiological categorization (ASSIMAKOPOULOS et al., 2017; EVANS, 2009). The study was also based on research on rituals of violence and verbal disputes among young people (BERTUCCI; BOYER, 2013; MOÏSE, 2011; VETTORATO, 2008). The results demonstrate that punch lines are produced mainly through the use of negative impoliteness strategies, denigrating the opponent and putting his reputation and arguments in check, as well as positive impoliteness, particularly through contempt for the rival. The use of resources that affirm the speaker's superiority contributes to this, directly disqualifying the opponent, the theme he deals with, as well as his verses, similarly to the categories identified by Cabral and Lima (2018) in a study on Facebook comments. In MC battles, however, impoliteness is built *ad hoc* and, in this sense, we argue that it can be interpreted as a type of mock impoliteness (CULPEPER, 2011)), as verbal acts of violence occur in a context for which they are not only foreseen, but required.

This study also identified the activation of axiological cognitive categorization processes, responsible for the formation of a polarization, in which sometimes diffuse characteristics, linked to belonging to the hip-hop culture, are reaffirmed to act as an idealized model of MC (or of

combatant). The alleged departure from this model (MAZZARA, 1997) operates to intensify the defamation of the rival, placing his belonging to the group under suspicion. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that the attack on the other is an intrinsic component of battles, since they constitute rituals of insult, as recorded in the literature of the field (BERTUCCI; BOYER, 2013; CUTLER, 1999; LABOV 1972; MOÏSE, 2011; VETTORATO, 2008). In these poetic clashes, when an attack strategy is activated, only the individual considered superior is affirmed, at least momentarily, as having intelligence, talent and prestige.

At the same time, the axiological models for which battles are based can also be diffuse, since cognitive categories are equally radial, and may contain more central members, as well as more peripheral ones (EVANS, 2009). This helps to explain the verbal plasticity of the punch lines analyzed here, which exhibit different degrees of centrality, with some verses or themes more similar to each other than others (for example, poetic lyricism and urban violence), instead of sharing a single dominant characteristic.

At this point in the text, it is also necessary to consider that the punch lines analyzed in this study also helped to confirm how the MC artistic language reflects the environment from which they come and, at the same time, projects them. In this perspective, MC King, when speaking (fighting) melodically to the beat of the DJ, creates a musical environment of conflict and harshness. At the same time, he reaffirms his artistic identity, as well as delimiting his territory as a hip-hopper and as a citizen.

Finally, this study analyzed a specific set of punch lines from a single MC. Other studies may expand these results to better contribute to the understanding of this culture of social affirmation and resistance.

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