



Verbal violence in contemporary political and media discourses: from dichotomization to insult

Violência verbal nos discursos político e mediático contemporâneos: da dicotomização ao insulto

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The *Language Studies Journal – RELIN (Revista Estudos da Linguagem)* dedicates this issue to the dissemination of studies resulting from researches that responded to the challenge of the call for papers on the theme of verbal violence on the contemporary political and mediatic discourses. This magazine's thematic issue was born from an invitation by Professor Gustavo Ximenes Cunha, Ph.D., professor of Faculty of Languages in the *Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG-Brasil)* and RELIN's Chief-Editor, a journal linked to the Postgraduate Studies Program in Linguistics Studies in UFMG.

Les conflits naissent d'une dynamique de plusieurs éléments constitutifs des personnes (la combativité, le désir mimétique d'appropriation, les émotions, les besoins), des groupes (les rôles, les enjeux de pouvoir, les processus cachés) et des systèmes culturels (valeurs, normes, rites, représentations, idéologie). Cette dynamique devient destructive et violente lorsqu'elle conduit à transgresser sans autorisation ni légitimité des limites individuelles (besoins, corps, biens), collectives (règles, lois, responsabilités) ou culturelles (valeurs, normes). (MOÏSE, 2012, p. 30.)

Starting from Claudine Moïse's epigraph, one of the most relevant European instigators in the verbal violence field (FRACCHIOLLA *et al.*, 2013; MOÏSE, 2012; MOÏSE *et al.*, 2008a, 2008b), we realize that we are on a vast study field that has aroused the interest from many fields of knowledge, from Psychology to Anthropology, from the Linguistics Sciences to Law—we have been seeing, recently, a progressive development of interdisciplinarity in face of the phenomena of growing violence in digital communication.

The theoretical studies point out that the verbal violence, in contexts of interpersonal, institutional or mediatic communication, arises from the difficulty to listen and understand the other, potentializing the tension and conflict, establishing, surreptitiously, disruptions from the point of view of the conversational routines and the pursuit of communication. It occurs majorly in the context of polarization, controversy, adversity, in which they expose and oppose arguments that seek to vilify and attack the face of the other, who is seen as an adversary.

The strategies in service of aggression and verbal violence are numerous, and can be studied through different and complementary approaches: from the lexical-semantic point of view that prioritizes the study of the indifference and rupture markers, the insults, the pejorative qualifiers, the obscene language to the pragmatic-discursive and interactional approach, in which the face-threatening acts, the rituals of humiliation, the demolishing irony, the rhetoric of intolerance, strategies that seek to depreciate, stigmatize or vilify the other are unveiled.

In fine, the internet's primacy and the obsessive compulsion of publications on social media naturally give rise to an increase of verbal violence phenomena. Noting that the digital mediums are the first ones on the propagation of website news, in real time, and that blogs are more and more dynamic and interactive; we can easily understand that the dizzying circulation of discourses fosters and allows the possibility to generate controversial, aggressive and conflicting interactions—in service of contemporary societies' culture of exposition and spectacle.

This RELIN's issue integrates fifteen studies from researchers of diverse nationalities, different universities, centers of investigation and research from: *Federal University of Espírito Santo, Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, Federal University of Campinas, University of São Paulo, State University of Mato Grosso, State University of Sudoeste da Bahia, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Pontifícia*

Universidade Católica de São Paulo, and, evidencing the relevant representation of the state of Minas Gerais, this issue presents texts from researchers from *Federal University of Minas Gerais*, *Federal University of Ouro Preto*, *Federal Institute of Education Science and Technology of North Minas Gerais*. Lending this issue international dimension, we also present works from two researchers, one from *University of Buenos Aires*, and the other one is a Portuguese researcher from *Universidade Aberta*.

In the opening article of the journal, titled “The verbal violence in explicit manifestations of linguistic prejudice on Facebook: an emic discursive space”, **Anderson Ferreira** and **Samine de Almeida Benfica** examine the verbal violence in comments produced on Facebook in a context of discussion about linguistic prejudice, drawing from a theoretical-methodological positioning that articulates the notions of discourse controversy, from inter-understanding and discourse space, as well as the category of the emic space (BAUMAN, 2001); that, in sintony with the title, takes a central spot in the analysis performed. For these authors, whose works are proved to be innovative, in this emic space the verbal violence assumes the role of a discursive manifestation of prejudice and intolerance, stemming from a previous consolidation in the social, cultural, and collective memory—that is, from a pre-constructed controversial space.

Similarly, **Francisco Vieira da Silva**, in the study “Violence on the web: discourses about Greta Thunberg in online comments”, analyzes a theme of great current relevance in focusing on online comments on *Uol* website about the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, who gained worldwide projection for the causes she defended (Fridays for Future) as well as for the recognition she has gained as Personality of the year in 2019, and for being invited to speak at the UN conference about Climate change in 2019; and in the World Economic Forum, in Davos, Switzerland in 2020. The research, which problematizes the rise of violent discourse against Greta Thunberg is theoretically based in Foucault’s archeology and analyzes insulting comments in this “daily rage tribunal”—an epithet by which Freire Filho (2014) characterizes the internet, highlighting its predominantly violent character. It is interesting to emphasize that in this study not every offensive discourse is embodied in the usage of insulting or violent expressions, but that some wailing statements, as for example, “I am so sorry for this girl” mirror positionings of pity that derive from the activist’s young age, discrediting her environmental discourse.

The use of words and expressions which have an underlying intention to attack another and that, according to Charadeau (2019), embody the violence through verbal language, is on the title of the paper by Romulo Santana Osthues, named “‘You really are a clown’—a word designation and its functioning as an insult”. Interestingly, it is similar to the work of two Portuguese researchers, Maria Helena Saianda and Olga Gonçalves, from the University of Évora, who presented a talk at a Congress in Lisbon on verbal courtesy with the curious title “Your excellency is a trickster”¹ (SAIANDA; GONÇALVES, 2014), in which they also analyzed the offensive utterances aimed at the Prime Minister.

The author bases this study on the theoretical postulates of Semantics of the Event and Discourse analysis to present a reading of the discursive functioning of the lexeme ‘clown’, demonstrating its pejorative meaning in a strife between politicians in a public hearing at the City Municipal chamber, in a city in the countryside of São Paulo. Throughout the analyzed excerpt, the author concludes that an argumentation is built around the use of ‘clown’, ‘tomfoolery’² and the corresponding phrasing ‘idiot’ and ‘stupid’ that point to their interpretation as an insult.

A debate about the use of the called ‘new swearwords’, that is, the use of identification categories of an ideological and political nature as an strategy of qualification of the interlocutor is the basis of the paper by **Maria do Carmo Leite de Oliveira, Carolina Valente e Rony Ron-REN**, called “Verbal and moral tug of war: a study on the use of categories as offense on the web environment”. The authors focus on the categorization phenomenon, favoring an ambivalent theoretical approach: on the one side, studies about categorization of belonging, and simultaneously, assumptions of conversational analysis based on ethnomethodology. They conclude, based on the analysis of postings published on the online newspaper *AND* about police action in Rio de Janeiro and the following online comments, that the phenomenon of categorization constitute an offensive recourse, being used as a tool to establish and radicalize the ideologically and politically polarizing environment.

¹ Original: “V. Ex^a é um trambiqueiro”.

² Original: “palhaçada”.

In an innovative perspective, specially for the theoretical foundation of a sociocognitive nature it is based upon, the paper by **Rafahel Jean Parintins Lima** and **Edwiges Maria Morato** “Racism and verbal violence: the textual and socio-cognitive construct of #SomosTodosMacacos”³ focuses on the meticulous observation of the textual and sociocognitive relation between racism and verbal violence. Although the authors emphasize that the studies on verbal violence privilege contexts in which the violence is linguistically explicit, they defend in this article that this relation between language, violence, and racism might not be of an explicit nature, leading to ontological complexity. This complexity is explained by sociocognitive processes, not strictly verbal, as frames responsible for the activation and mobilization of knowledge and experience. The researchers undertake the analysis of referential and intertextual processes and the frames of racism that are engaged in the hashtag #SomosTodosMacacos in order to show that there is effectively verbal violence grounded on ethnic-racial prejudice.

Derogative qualifiers, provocations, threats, insults, disparaging acts—as we can attest in the array of articles present in this issue, there is a vexing, ostracizing dimension, that often reflect power games and categorization processes present in asymmetrical interactions, governed by authority relationships. The quote that appears on the title of the paper “‘They can’t be black or fat’: analyzing verbal violence in socio-discursive reactions produced by readers in Brazilian news context”, which was published in newspapers in Belo Horizonte, corresponds to the transcription of a piece of news about a company that opposed to the hiring of “black and fat” caregivers. This explicit form of exclusion and the comments it generates are at the center of the analysis by **Maria Carmen Aires Gomes** e de **Alexandra Bitencourt de Carvalho** who call on the theoretical assumptions of Critical Discourse Analysis, and of representational and ideational meanings to demonstrate that both the news report and the socio-discursive verbal reactions analyzed point to intersectional discrimination. To cite one of the quotes that appear on the last page of the text and which deserves ample reflection from the readers: “Thus, we affirm that, more that discuss what verbal violence

³ Note: a literal translation of the hashtag would be #WeAreAllMonkeys. In Brazilian Portuguese, using the term “monkey” to refer to a black person is considered extremely offensive and it is legally punishable.

is present in society, what is important is to analyze how they occur, and which social and discursive contexts dialectically produce the conditions for its existence”.

Following the acknowledgment that hate discourse “is in full boil in the present-day public arena”, **Melliandro Mendes Galinari** proposes some parameters of identification of hate speech in society in a challenging text named “Identifying ‘hate discourse’: a rhetorical-discursive approach”. The author follows the school of thought of Discourse Analysis, in line with Pêcheux, Orlandi and Amossy and the studies about Rhetoric and argumentation to analyze several discursive practices. Firstly, judicial practice per se, that is, legislation as such. Then, he examines the importance of context, stressing the importance of enunciation circumstances to the understanding of the discourses and their impact. He outlines a scenario of the Brazilian context, supported by official statistic data that corroborate several glaring types of violence in Brazil, in order to show that hate discourse is social and collective and represents both a class weapon and exclusion mechanism; to list some of its main characteristics, as also to study its psychosocial cultural and historical production conditions. He uses memes from an Instagram page to illustrate this, focusing on the objectification, exotification, and stigmatization. He approaches briefly other discursive operations recurring in hate discourse, such as slander and defamation, the defamation of elation about someone else’s misfortune, depiction of evil, insult or inducement to insult, ridicule, delegitimization and negationism. He emphasizes that these hate discourses are measured and identified by exclusion effects, physical violence and by the denial of citizenship in particular contexts.

In an equally discursive perspective, with a rhetorical and multimodal focus, **Laura Cristina Bonnila-Neira** presents a paper titled “Tópicos y violencia verbal en la convocatória a la marcha #NoMásDesgobierno en Colombia”,⁴ resulted from an investigation undertaken about slogans and hashtags which appear repeatedly in the call for a demonstration in Colombia. The author analyzes the use of polemic argumentative modality as a predominant strategy in the confrontation between government objectors and towards the peace

⁴ Topics and verbal violence in the call for the #NoMoreMismanagement march in Colombia.

agreements in Colombia. She uses messages about the call for the march in april 2016 found on twitter and facebook to analyze the themes and display of verbal aggressiveness and concludes that they contain refutation techniques, namely the *ad hominem* argumentation. Cristina Bonnila-Neira bases her analysis of slogans and hashtags on the notion of ‘discourse of protest’ by Grinshpun 2013, as well as Maingueneau’s ideas that highlight the capacity of these short utterances to reinforce the cohesion of a collectiveness, opposing it to an exterior threat and implying an *ethos* of commitment, at the service of a under-construction collective’s discourse. The theoretical-methodological framing of this study calls Amossy’s propose on Discourse Argumentation, aligning it to a rhetorical-argumentative perspective from Perelman and Olberecht-Tyteca; equally applying Kerbrat-Orecchioni and Angenot’s concepts of Enunciative Linguistics, as well as Kress and van Leeuwe’s principles for multimodal utterances analysis.

In a much as the analysis allowed for the compilation of a series of topics used in the convocation, the great polarization of Colombian society was proven, leading the author to conclude that the predominant argumentation techniques in the construction of controversial and confrontational discourse were *ad hominem* attacks, opponent downgrading, paronomasia, the repeated use of predicates of negative processes and demonization, which lead to a threatening, dysphoric orientation.

In the article by **Marilena Inácio de Souza** and **Roberto Leiser Baronas**, titled “Beyond the argumentative functioning of the controversy announced by Paulo Guedes about Brazilian domestic workers”, the authors dwell on the analysis of a verbal controversy around a statement made by Finance Minister Paulo Guedes in February 2020 about the dollar value and the supposed trips to Disney by domestic servants, a current issue that had ample repercussion in the media. The study about the Minister’s controversial and prejudiced remark triggered a huge polemic and was the subject of this research, in which the authors sought to understand how polemic works, characterized by dissent and by declarative conflict, and scrutinize how the offended party in this polemic reacted to the Ministers’ comment. The authors grounded their research on theoretical studies about verbal polemic cited by Amossy, as well as studies about the role of the media and their responsibility in public debate. Moreover, they complement their theoretical ground by

following the theoretical assumptions of Marie-Anne Paveau's reframing discourse theory proposal which brings a reflection about the response to polemic, namely the insulting responses that take place in techno-discursive practices that circulate the social web.

The analysis of the attacked subjects' statements was thoroughly conducted following the seven criteria proposed by Paveau, revealing that they react, resist, and speak up for themselves which thusly confirm the importance of interdiscourse, of what was 'already mentioned', of discourse retakes, and of allusions in the dynamic management of the controversy.

Still on the Political arena, but now in the Brazilian Parliament, **Joseane Silva Bittencourt** and **Maria da Conceição Fonseca-Silva**, in the study titled "Verbal violence on Brazilian Parliament: discourse analysis of an insult and its political and legal effects", explored the discursive functioning of a case of verbal violence involving two congressmen, in 2014, during a plenary session, using discursive corpus comprised of published materials about the theme on institutionalized media news sites. The authors subscribe to the Discourse analysis theory, namely Pecheux's ideas, and draw from studies on insult, the relation of language and verbal violence. They conclude that from divergent discourse positions were produced effects of verbal aggression, and they were also produced from the analysis and identification of these legal effects of the report, of the instigation of the crime, moral damage and insult.

Three researchers from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, **Rosângela Alves dos Santos Bernardino**, **Daliane Pereira do Nascimento** and **Raimundo Romão Batista** carried out a discourse analysis focusing on the concept of 'enunciative responsibility' on the study titled "Enunciative responsibility and ideological position in polarized discourses about homoaffective marriage". In this study, they examine eight comments posted on *Portal de Notícias GI* and on *Facebook*, which were related to the news about same sex marriage using the theoretical framework of Text Discourse Analysis and the concepts proposed by Jean-Michel Adam. From the analysis of autonomic modulation phenomena, and from exploring specifically non-coincidence of saying as marks of enunciative responsibility, the authors investigate the management of voices in order to identify the voices which support the polarized discourse about homoaffective marriage, and also describe

the text-discursive strategies—and the imputation and the assumption of viewpoint in order to interpret the underlying ideological positioning. It should be noted in this text the ideological, interactional, and dialogical perspective of language which is carefully explained on point 3, “Language, ideology and dialogism” and which draws on Volochinov’s concepts and Bakhtin’s writings.

The analysis revealed, as the authors assert, a “sort of duel” in which on one side there are those in favor of the news, and on the other side, dichotomously, those who are radically opposed. It is significant, from an ideological point of view, to support and to subordinate to religious principles.

Marina Silva Ninitas, in the curiously titled paper “‘Pennants exchange’: for the study of verbal violence on the polemic about the Orthographic Agreement in Portugal” which borrows from a Portuguese idiom, studies the major linguistic and discursive strategies that embody the aggressiveness and verbal violence in the ongoing polemic with huge public attention about the orthographic agreement.

Grounding her research on several complementary theoretical perspectives, namely Pragmatics, Rhetoric, argumentation studies and some concepts from interactional linguistics, the author shows how frustrating and divisive this theme is in Portuguese society. After realizing a detailed socio-historical background of the 1990 Orthographic Agreement, the linguist analyzes two texts by reputable leading figures of the Portuguese political landscape with diametrically opposed standpoints on the matter. The analysis is detailed, and it individualizes and explicits the text’s title and closure, emphasizing the primacy of analysis of the body of the articles, in which the author highlights the issue of the *ethos* of arrogance and superiority common to both authors; the author also clarifies the strategies explicitly used both in defense and in attack; and dwells on the power of argument, visible in the resumption of the other’s point of view and in the rigorous explanation of arguments and in the axiology of terms, showing the deliberate choice in order to discredit the other and their arguments. She concludes that, in the Portuguese media, the polemic around the Orthographic Agreement regrettably conforms to offense, personal or political dispute and face-threatening rather than draw from linguistic arguments that support the adoption or refusal of the legal document.

Confirming the tension, aggressiveness, conflict escalation, and the growing verbal violence that seems to be prevalent on the internet, **Wilma Maria Pereira** researches the strategies used in the construction of digital interaction on her paper titled “Confrontational discourse on the internet: an interactionist discourse analysis of comments on news websites”. The author focuses her analysis on two complementary theoretical models which prove to be efficient: the Geneva’s Modular Model of Discourse Analysis, which helps to demonstrate the discursive organization of the comments, which are built based on impolite acts, and J. Culpeper’s impoliteness model, which in turn helps to list what impoliteness strategies are engaged to this end.

The author analyzes comments compiled from the digital press, from the Yahoo News website after the publication of a text by Pichonelli that covers issues related to the Brazilian political arena in the beginning of 2009, a turbulent and polarized political period. The analysis, which strictly follows the proposed theoretical assumptions, and which is presented in a careful and accurate manner, shows that the subjects who produce these comments do not employ face-work strategies to minimize the offensive tenor of the interaction, but rather promote a deliberate insult, enhancing a social polarization already in place. The author concludes that there is a propensity for the manifestation of verbal attacks to the interlocutor’s positive face expressed through the use of taboo terms, swearing, inappropriate naming, and offensive, derogative metaphors. However, these acts also seek to preserve a positive image of those who produce them.

The ebullience and polarization of Brazilian politics is undoubtedly a fruitful theme for several discursive analysis, and its relevance is shown in the study by **Mônica Santos de Souza Melo**, “From polemic to hate discourse: a study of reception on Twitter based on a semiotic linguistics perspective”. Starting from a video published by the Brazilian ex-congressman Jean Wyllys and the comments from the video on Twitter, the researcher proceeds an analysis of the comments produced by the internet users. The author frames her study on Charadeau’s semiotic linguistics theory of discourse, which dialogues with Amossy’s contributions about polemic in discourse and Barros’s intolerance discourse theory. She categorizes the characteristics of Twitter as a space of debate and intervention and based on the analysis of the comments she identifies some recurrent themes, such as the linking of

the other to sin; the demonization of the other, ridicule—which were taken from stances expressed in an attitude of agreement and disagreement. The cited examples, notably the ones of rejection, eloquently illustrate the offensive character of the interventions, filled with hate expressions and explicit displays of gender, religious, and political intolerance.

Thusly, the author proves that interaction on this social media platform might function as a space of debate, not only disseminating hate discourse but, at the same time, providing a space of oppression and silencing.

Based on the assumption that Brazilian MC rap battles are a part of the oral and musical tradition of the Afro-american and latino community, **Ana Larissa Adorno Marciotto Oliveira** and **Ana Lúcia Tinoco Cabral**, on “MC Battles: a study on (im)politeness and axiological categorization under the light of pragmatics”, analyze the punchlines of the battles from a pragmatic perspective, under the light of the theory of linguistic (im)politeness, as well as the notion of axiological categorization, seeing them as rituals of violence and verbal dispute. The results show that the punchlines are produced mainly through the use of negative impoliteness strategies, such as denigrating the opponent and putting their arguments and reputation at risk, as well as positive impoliteness specially through contempt for the rival. The authors also detected the processes of cognitive axiological activation responsible for polarization in which somewhat diffuse characteristics related to belonging to hip-hop culture are reaffirmed to act as an idealized MC model. The authors were also able to clearly demonstrate though this study that the punchlines reflect and project the environment from where the MCs come from.

In conclusion, as the reader will be able to attest, this issue of RELIN brings to light invaluable articles that mark as accomplished the challenge we dared to take up. The diversity of theoretical approaches, the multisemiotic complexity of the analyzed discourse, the accuracy of the analysis, the originality and up-to-dateness of the research all show the enthusiasm and commitment of those who pursued this goal.

We are thankful to all those who contributed and encourage the continuous collaboration with *Language Studies Journal – RELIN (Revista Estudos da Linguagem)*, which is, inarguably, an excellent publication on linguistic-discourse analysis of the Portuguese language.

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