



The conflictive discourse on the internet: a discursive-interactionist analysis of comments on news site

O discurso conflituoso na internet: uma análise discursiva- interacionista de comentários em site de notícia

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Abstract: Considering the internet as an environment where a large circulation of strongly controversial discourses occur, prone to the materialization of insults and verbal aggressions, the objective of this paper is to investigate the strategies used by the interactants to build their interventions in the digital environment. The perspective of the analysis is centered on the model of impoliteness suggested by Culpeper (1996, 2005) and on the Modular Approach to Discourse Analysis (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001). We present two approaches to the analysis of impolite acts to demonstrate how they can be complementary in the study of impoliteness. Thus, the intersection between them allows, besides the classification of the impolite acts, to describe the textual organization of the comments to reveal the structure of the offensive discourses and the action of the internet users in the negotiation of faces, places, and territories.

Keywords: im/politeness; modular approach; comments.

Resumo: Considerando a internet como um espaço em que circulam uma diversidade de discursos de alto potencial polêmico, propícios à materialização de insultos e agressões verbais, o objetivo deste trabalho é investigar as estratégias utilizadas pelos interactantes para a construção de suas intervenções no meio digital. A perspectiva de análise está centrada no modelo de impolidez sugerido por Culpeper (1996, 2005) e no

Modelo de Análise Modular do Discurso (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001). Busca-se apresentar duas abordagens para a análise dos atos impolidos, demonstrando de que maneira elas podem ser complementares no estudo da impolidez. Dessa forma, a interseção entre elas permite, além da classificação dos atos impolidos, descrever a organização textual dos comentários a fim de desvelar a estrutura dos discursos ofensivos e a ação dos internautas na negociação de faces, lugares e territórios.

Palavras-Chave: im/polidez; abordagem modular; comentários.

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1 Introduction

Many authors have recently dedicated themselves to the investigation of linguistic phenomena that presuppose some type of “disagreement” between the interlocutors in various contexts. Roulet (1989), in a brief article, addressed controversy, polemic, and strife under the nomenclature of “agonistic acts,” i.e., those that evoke “fight,” “competition” or “dispute.” Culpeper (1996, 2005) investigated the offense directed at reality show participants, verbal attacks on television series, and in literary texts. Amossy (2011), using an example from the French electronic press, analyzed the controversy and rhetorical argument in discussion forums. Leech (2014) highlighted non-politeness, impoliteness, irony or sarcasm, and jokes as contrasting forms of politeness. Impurity in digital media was the focus given by Cunha (2012, 2013) and by Balocco and Shepherd (2017) for the study of aggressive language. Cunha (2019) and Cunha and Tomazi (2019) present, from a modular perspective, the negotiation process between the interlocutors when they are in a discursive confrontation. From different theoretical perspectives, these works¹ have the merit of helping to gradually fill the gap that had hitherto existed in studies focused on the analysis of impolite behaviors and all the actions they invoke such as rudeness,

¹ The list of works mentioned here is not intended to be exhaustive. It presents only a small number of studies relevant to the study of behaviors imposed in various contexts and in various theoretical perspectives that somehow align with the work proposed here.

cursing, insulting, injury, defamation, threat, and verbal abuses that occur in contexts where antagonism and polarization seem paramount, for example, in the interactions that take place in digital media.

Currently, the internet and its various tools for collective participation (chats, interactive blogs, comments, hashtags, discussion forums, etc.) have become a public space for convergence for these “dissents.” According to Amossy (2011), “only the internet allows the dissemination of an enormous amount of material in real time, naturally intended to circulate, to disseminate, to be read, commented on, enriched, and deepened by Internet users” (AMOSSY, 2011, p. 11). The result of this virtual “collective meeting” may be the materialization of discursive disputes in large proportions in which verbal assault, often, has a fundamental role in the construction of the points of view that are presented and defended in the digital environment. Thus, the presence of aggressiveness and verbal violence in this context testifies to the existence of highly controversial, apparently irreconcilable discourses, which have two facets: the need to be “credited” on the one hand and, on the other, the attempt to “discredit” the supposed opponent. Thus, it is possible to infer that “the internet – as a means of communication – creates the conditions for the circulation of speeches that, in itself, has a very strong controversial potential” (AMOSSY, 2011, p. 11).

In this verbal conflict context, in which there is an exacerbated confrontation of antagonistic theses, it is in our interest to investigate the conflicting or controversial² interactions materialized in the comments published on news sites about the political context and, above all, the action of interactants in the management of faces, places, and territories.³

² See Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1980). It is a type of discourse that is generally written, dialogical, refuting (it is a counter-discourse that presupposes disagreement between the interlocutors), argumentative, with a strong pejorative axiological intensity and with a disqualifying objective, which occurs in a context of violence and passion, and within a certain duration.

³ The concept of face refers to “a positive social value that a person effectively invokes for himself along the line that others assume that it assumed during a given contact” (GOFFMAN, 2012, p. 15). The term territory, on the other hand, refers to the “inviolable” scope of the individual’s activity, that is, the intimate personal issues, feelings and thoughts, issues related to the individual’s body and space (GOFFMAN, 2012). Finally, the concept of place concerns “a vertical or dominance relationship between the interactants” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 353).

Thus, we intend to analyze through the theoretical model suggested by Culpeper (1996, 2005) which *strategies of impoliteness* (CULPEPER, 1996, 2005) are mobilized for this purpose. Then, through the theoretical-methodological postulates of the Modular Approach to Discourse Analysis (MADA) (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001), we propose to investigate how the discursive organization of comments is managed in the performance of impolite acts⁴, and also to demonstrate the integrative capacity of this model. We believe that the analysis of “impolite comments” based on these two approaches allows us to understand, in well-demarcated stages, not only their characterization, but their interactional dynamics based on the action of the interactants in the performance of the impolite acts, also making it possible to expand the possibilities of analysis of impoliteness.

The *corpus* selected for this work consists of a selected fraction of a total of five hundred comments that constitute the *corpus* of ongoing research on impoliteness in social networks. We consider that the fraction presented here significantly illustrates the most recurrent forms of impolite actions of the interactants in the investigated digital environment. The analyzed comments were published on the Yahoo News website as a result of the publication of the article *For Bolsonaro, “hyenas” are all those who do not bow to his majesty*⁵, by journalist Matheus Pichonelli, released on October 29, 2019. For our analysis, the first published comments were collected and organized under the “most relevant” criteria on the website. It is worth mentioning that we consider the comments, as well as Balocco and Shepherd (2017), as an instance of opinionated media discourse that allows readers to express their views on a given subject. Also, “the comments refer to an earlier

⁴ The notion of act used here makes no reference to the Theory of Speech Acts. It relates to the performance of verbal or language actions that are being imposed.

⁵ In Portuguese: *Para Bolsonaro, “hienas” são todos os que não se curvam à sua majestade*. The news refers to the release of a video made by the president Jair Bolsonaro on his Twitter account on 28 October 2019. In the video, the president is represented by a lion surrounded by enemy hyenas that, in the montage, represented institutions such as the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, press vehicles, political parties, Supreme Federal Court, among others). The video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5Uhyt81PwE> and the news are available at <https://br.noticias.yahoo.com/bolsonaro-hienas-video-leao-114256636.html>.

text; they are the responsibility of a user; they are opinionated texts that occur in spaces defined in digital journalism, that is, they are texts that suffer restrictions imposed by the software (size); they are thus called ('comments') by the digital media itself "(BALOCCO; SHEPHERD, 2017, p. 1022).

We will present below a brief history of the studies of impoliteness, highlighting mainly the approach of Culpeper (1996, 2005) and his perspective for the analysis of the impolite acts. Next, we will present the Modular Approach to Discourse Analysis as a proposal to expand some aspects related to impoliteness, for example, the situational restrictions and the relational aspects of the text as a negotiation strategy in the "dispute" imposed among the interactants. Therefore, we will address the comments from four components of the MADA, namely, the hierarchical and situational dimensions, the form of relational organization, and the form of strategic organization.

2 The studies of impoliteness: a brief history

From the studies on politeness developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), significant advances were made in relation to the use of language for the management of social relations. Based on the concept of face, inherited from Goffman (1967), these researchers proposed to develop a "theory of politeness." Among the principles of this theory is the recognition of the sacredness and vulnerability of the face and the efforts to guarantee its preservation against possible Face Threatening Acts (FTAs),⁶ that can occur in any interaction. Thus, according to this theory, one of the objectives of the interaction is the preservation of the faces that are at stake and one of the ways to do this is to seek mutually, or cooperatively, strategies to minimize possible attacks, thus ensuring the balance of social interactions.

However, as with conflicting interactions on the internet, there are several contexts in which the purpose of the interaction is not aimed at maintaining social harmony or preserving the face. In these contexts, the interactants would not be motivated to act cooperatively to guarantee the stability of the interaction but would be guided, by several factors, to

⁶ FTAs: acronym used by Brown and Levinson (1987) to designate Face Threatening Acts.

act rudely and impolitely. According to Culpeper (1996, p. 354), “there are circumstances in which the vulnerability of the face is uneven and the motivation to cooperate is reduced.” The author also considers that these circumstances relate to contexts in which impoliteness plays a central role. Examples of these contexts are presented by Culpeper (1996, 2005), Culpeper; Bousfield and Wichmann (2003), and Culpeper and Hardaker (2017) when analyzing the dialogues that occur between officers and recruits in army training, the situations of disagreement between car owners and traffic cops in television series, reality shows that explore the “superiority” of the presenter in relation to the participants, etc., exposing their faces to various types of attacks and embarrassment.

This interactional perspective focused on verbal conflict suggests the need for a new look at the way people interact with each other in these specific contexts. In addition, this perspective indicates the relevance of an analysis of impoliteness and human relationships in contexts where the controversy and possible verbal attacks that it usually invokes seem to be the central point of the interaction.⁷

As in the studies on politeness, impoliteness has also established itself as a well-defined field of investigation. This advance is due to pioneering work on impoliteness, as specified by Leech (2014, p. 235), when referring to the studies by Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2011a, 2011b), Culpeper *et al.* (2003), Bousfield (2008), Bousfield and Locher (2008), who advanced this field of investigation. Culpeper and Hardaker (2017) also mention the advances that have been gradually taking place in this field of impoliteness studies. According to the authors, “the field of linguistic impoliteness first developed in a very irregular way, then gained momentum in the mid-90s, however, it only really started around 2008” (CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017, p. 199). When referring to this process of expanding studies on impoliteness, Culpeper and Hardaker (2017) mention three distinct moments that characterize it. The first moment, anchored in classic models of pragmatics, refers, according to Culpeper and Hardaker (2017), to the work of Lachenicht (1980), which, according to them, was the first comprehensive and theoretically

⁷ See Amossy (2017). Not all verbal violence is controversial, that is, “the discursive procedures that create an impression of verbal violence only become controversial when they are used in the context of a confrontation of contradictory opinions” (AMOSSY, 2017, p. 63).

grounded work on the theme of impoliteness. According to these authors, this work did not trigger a wave of research on impoliteness, as occurred with the politeness from the work of Brown and Levinson (1987), for instance. The result of adopting this posture focused on politeness was the emergence of a theoretical gap between the studies of politeness and impoliteness, marked by little interest in the impolite events and by insufficient theoretical-descriptive apparatus to encompass impoliteness, as mentioned by Eelen (2001 p. 98), for example, when arguing that theories of politeness are generally not well equipped, conceptually or descriptively, to explain impoliteness.

In addition to this work, Culpeper and Hardaker (2017) also mention the study by Craig *et al.* (1986). According to them, these authors developed a more adequate approach to the dynamics of interpersonal communication, considering both hostile and cooperative communication. Based on the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), Craig *et al.* (1986) published one of the first articles discussing face-attack or face-aggravation, pointing out the consequences of this theory of not approaching face-attack strategies in a systematic way, which, according to them, contributed to the existence of a gap in the description of the data referring to the impolite behaviors.

Still in the wake of the pioneering work on impoliteness, Culpeper (1996) complements the list of authors who were concerned with this theme. Culpeper (1996) expands the studies of impoliteness by systematically elaborating a set of specific strategies to characterize the face-attack. It is a flip-side structure to the politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson (1987). Thus, for each of the politeness strategies, Culpeper (1996) proposes an opposite impoliteness strategy. As Culpeper (1996) specifies, they are opposed in terms of face orientation, i.e., instead of assuaging or mitigating threats, impoliteness strategies are a means of attacking the face. This first moment is called by Culpeper and Hardaker (2017) the “first wave” of the studies of impoliteness.

The second moment of the studies of impoliteness refers to the studies developed under the perspective of a discursive approach, articulated by the studies of Eelen (2001), Mills (2003), and Watts (2003). According to Culpeper (2017, p. 207), this second wave of politeness approach sought to articulate both politeness and impoliteness. The focus of this second wave was not on presenting a distinction between the two concepts, but on social interaction, in which politeness or impoliteness

could be accounted for. In other words, it focused on showing how the concept of impoliteness is revealed in the discourse of interactants or laypeople, and not on how the layman's discourse fits into a concept developed by academics. This attitude adopted by these authors implies that "impoliteness is constructed in the ebb and flow of interaction, and that the very concept of impoliteness itself and its definition is subject to discursive struggle" (CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017, p. 2007). This conception differs from this moment from previous approaches to impoliteness that, according to Culpeper and Hardaker (2017), tended to focus exclusively on the meaning intended by the speaker and on the treatment of impoliteness as a relatively stable aspect of certain linguistic forms.

About the third moment in the studies of impoliteness, Culpeper and Hardaker (2017) highlight the work of Bousfield (2008), his first volume of papers (BOUSFIELD; LOCHER, 2008) and the first special issue of the journal dedicated to impoliteness: *Impoliteness: Eclecticism and Diaspora* (*Journal of Politeness Research*, 4 (2), edited by Bousfield and Culpeper (2008). Returning to Locher and Bousfield (2008), Culpeper and Hardaker (2017) mention the fact that the work on impoliteness has progressed to a middle ground between the classic approach, from the first moment, focused on the systematization and classification of impoliteness, and the discursive which involves the action of interactants and their respective social contexts for the investigation of impoliteness. As mentioned by the authors (2017), this happened with the increase in relational approaches (SPENCER-OATEY, 2001, 2008), the frame-based approach to politeness (TERKOURAFI, 2001) and impoliteness (TERKOURAFI, 2008, 2009), and the interactive approach (ARUNDALE, 1999; HAUGH, 2007). A relevant point to be highlighted with these theories is that they cover both the perspective of the speaker and the hearer, in addition to centralizing the role of the context in the treatment of impoliteness. In his most recent work, Culpeper (2011a)⁸ has aligned himself with this perspective.

⁸ As mentioned, many authors, besides Culpeper, have dedicated themselves to the study of impoliteness. For theoretical convenience, we will use the postulates of Culpeper for considering them apt to the objectives that we intend with this work.

2.1 Impoliteness strategies: Culpeper's approach

In his 1996 work, Culpeper established a set of strategies for designating impolite acts. For this, the author listed the superstrategies and the output strategies of impoliteness. According to Culpeper and Hardaker (2017, p. 208), “the former is of a higher order and involve the general orientation of the act; the latter is the most specific means by which superstrategies are achieved.” The superstrategies of impoliteness are specified by Culpeper (1996, 2005) as follows:⁹

- (1) *Bald-on-record impoliteness* – the FTA is performed directly, clearly, without ambiguity, and concisely in circumstances where the face is not irrelevant or minimized;
- (2) *Positive politeness* – the use of strategies designed to harm the positive face of the recipient;
- (3) *Negative impoliteness* – the use of strategies aimed at harming the recipient's negative face;
- (4) *Sarcasm or false politeness* – FTA is carried out using politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain superficial realizations;
- (5) *Withhold politeness* – the absence of politeness in situations where it would be expected, for example, failing to show gratitude when receiving kindness from someone.
- (6) *Off-record politeness*: the FTA is performed through an implicature, but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others.

In addition to superstrategies, Culpeper also describes the output strategies of positive impoliteness and negative impoliteness¹⁰ that specify the impolite behaviors directed at the positive or negative face of an interlocutor. As mentioned, output strategies are a means of fulfilling the strategic ends of a super strategy. The output strategies of impoliteness are systematized in the table below adapted from Culpeper (1996, 2005).

⁹ Culpeper (1996) lists the first five strategies. In Culpeper (2005), the author adds the sixth strategy to his model.

¹⁰ See Culpeper (1996): *Positive impoliteness output strategies* and *Negative impoliteness output strategies*.

TABLE 1 – Impoliteness strategies

POSITIVE IMPOLITENESS OUTPUT STRATEGIES	NEGATIVE IMPOLITENESS OUTPUT STRATEGIES
Ignoring, snub the other – not recognizing the other’s presence. Be disinterested, carefree, unsympathetic	Frighten – instill a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur.
Exclude the other from an activity	Condescend, scorn, or ridicule – emphasize your relative power. Be contemptuous
Disassociate from the other – for example, deny association or common ground with the other; avoid sitting together	Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g., use diminutives).
Being disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic	Invade the other’s space – literally (e.g., position yourself closer to the other than the relationship permits) or metaphorically (e.g., ask for or speak about information which is too intimate given the relationship)
Use inappropriate identity markers – for example, use title and surname when a close relationship pertains or nickname when a distant relationship pertains	Explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect – personalize, use the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’
Use obscure or secret language – for example, mystify the other with jargon, or use a code known to others in the group, but not the target	Put the other’s indebtedness on record, etc.
Seek disagreement – select a sensitive topic.	
Make the other feel uncomfortable – for example, do not avoid silence, joke, or use small talk	
Use taboo words – swear, or use abusive or profane language.	
Call the other names – use derogatory nominations. etc.	

Source: adapted from Culpeper (1996, p. 356).

From the set of superstrategies, Culpeper (1996, 2005) conceives impoliteness as the use of “communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony” (Culpeper *et*

al. 2003, p. 1546). Seeking to refine this concept and provide answers to some inadequacies pointed out by those who commented on his work,¹¹ Culpeper (2005) proposed a revised definition for the concept of impoliteness, that is, “impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2).” (CULPEPER, 2005, p. 38). What we observe in this definition elaborated by Culpeper (2005) is the implicature that “the phenomenon of impoliteness is to do with how offense is communicated and taken” (CULPEPER, 2005, p. 36) by the interactants in a given context, that is, “The key aspect of this definition is that it makes clear that impoliteness, as indeed politeness, is constructed in the interaction between speaker and hearer” (CULPEPER, 2005, p. 38). In this conception, impoliteness is a two-layered interactional phenomenon, that is “the offensive information being expressed by the utterance and the information that that information is being expressed intentionally” (CULPEPER, 2005, p. 39). In addition to rescuing the role of the joint action of the speaker and the hearer in the interaction, this concept invokes another primordial and problematic issue for the investigation of impoliteness: intentionality.

As Culpeper (2005, p. 39) himself mentions, “recognizing intentions is highly problematic: they have to be inferred in communication”. To infer impoliteness in the interaction is to evaluate its effects based on the action of the interactants or the way they react to the supposed attacks. This helps to exclude, according to him, by-products, accidental, and mock types of face-threats. The result of this “inference” is to recognize in these categories not only signs but to present a specific distinction with regard to intentional cases of impoliteness, for example, the action of someone who intended to offend, hatched a plan to carry out that offense and carried it out with full awareness; from cases in which the offense was accidentally carried out, for example, a *faux pas* (CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017).

For Culpeper and Hardaker (2017, p. 203), “what is certainly clear is that intentionality is not a necessary condition of impoliteness. “That’s because, according to him, people can build an act that is both

¹¹ The main issues pointed out concern the attention only in the speaker, the lack of consideration due to the context, the inaccuracy of the expression “social disharmony” etc.

unintentional and offensive. Leech (2014), based on the scales to assess impoliteness, considers that giving a low value to the efforts of the other is a way of being impolite without, however, having the intention of promoting a face-attack.

Culpeper (2011a) explains the fact that not all impoliteness is intentional, because (a) sometimes the producer of impoliteness is unaware of the effects of impoliteness they are causing and (b) the act is considered impolite nevertheless, because the producer is blamed for not previously identifying these effects. The question of intentionality evokes once again the importance of the context for the analysis of the impolite acts, as a single behavior can be considered impolite in one situation but not in another. The same applies to the meaning of words that can be aggressive or not depending on the type of relationship that is established between the interactants, the status of each one of them, and the places they occupy in the social structure.

In order to systematize the phenomenon of impoliteness from a more refined concept, Culpeper (2011a) conceives impoliteness as:

a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organisation, including, in particular, how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others in interaction. *Situated behaviours are viewed negatively – considered 'impolite' – when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be.* Such behaviours always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence. (CULPEPER, 2011a, p. 23, emphasis added).

With this definition, Culpeper (2011a) not only responds to controversial points in the initial definitions with regard to the speaker's perspective and intentionality but also encompasses the context as a fundamental element for the notion of impoliteness. What the author proposes based on this consideration is the need for an appropriate descriptive scheme to account for the impolite behaviors, considering that the supposed marginality that some use to refer to these behaviors does not hold up in contexts in which their operationalization seems very central.

In summary, what Culpeper (1996, 2005) proposes with his model is a descriptive mechanism for the analysis of impolite behaviors, which must be considered from specific contexts in which many variables may be at play. In this way, it is possible to perceive that impoliteness can be “strategic, systematic, sophisticated and not uncommon, given the salience of impoliteness events in the social environment, the amount of public discussion they attract and the possible negative effects for the faces in confrontation” (CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017, p. 206). Based on the strategies postulated by Culpeper (1996, 2005), we will initially proceed with the identification of the impoliteness strategies to verify their recurrence in the comments. Subsequently, we will submit the comments to the theoretical and methodological arrangement of MADA, systematizing the analysis proposed here more comprehensively.

2.1.1 Impoliteness strategies in comments

As mentioned previously, the comments analyzed in this work are a small section of a total of five hundred comments that constitute the *corpus* of ongoing research on impoliteness in social networks. These comments come from news from the digital press that addressed issues related to the Brazilian political context at the beginning of 2019. It was a troubled political moment and many expectations, marked by the defeat of the left and the rise to power of a politician representing the right. This scenario favorable to the polarization and antagonism of ideas drove the action of many voters in digital media in the negotiation of their points of view.

For the selection, we used a tool provided by the Yahoo News website to organize the comment chain on your articles. The selection tool presents the following options for readers: *main reactions*, *most recent reactions*, *recently discussed*, *oldest reactions*. When accessing the comments home page, the option “main reactions” is presented in the foreground. If desired, the reader can select one of the other options, which will interfere with the order in which comments are presented. For our study, we chose the first sequence presented: *main reactions*, which indicate the interventions that most received some type of reaction (like, emojis, etc.) or triggered new comments. In this context, we consider that

these actions may indicate the interest of the interlocutors in the debate on issues of public order, possibly mobilizing contradictory opinions. The collected comments¹² are as follows:

- I1: Bolso is hallucinating greatness! What a video of total imbecility! The rotten connection with Queiroz, muzzling COAF and he doesn't want to be questioned?! Are they attacking the lion of morals and ethics?! The people can no longer be blind followers, Pray and "Watch"!
- I2: I've never seen a lion become a pussy's father, isn't it, Carluxa?
- I3: BozoAss manages to be more regrettable with every new comment he vomits. Worst president in history. For fuck's sake.
- I4: Funny thing is that Bolso-Ass and his jackass No. 02 don't talk about suing Fabrício Queiroz, is it the syndrome of having their ass locked up on something?
- I5: you from the rotten and filthy press as well as the psychopaths of the left are hyenas
- I6: By the level of comments we can already spot the profile of those who graduated at the time of plural school...

In the first reaction, the commenter¹³ starts his intervention using the term Bolso in reference to President Jair Bolsonaro, stating that he is hallucinating. The action of using aliases or forms of "unusual naming" is recurrent on social networks and is usually related to the attempt to "hide" the name of certain people or events to reduce their "popularization" on the network. Considering the polarization context from which the comments arise, this seems to be the strategy used by many commenters that also justifies the high recurrence of "codenames" to refer to the president such as *Bolso*, *Bozo*, *Bolso-ass*, etc.

Concerning strategies of impoliteness, Culpeper (1996) formulates that the improper "appointment," as specified above, is a way of being

¹² The comments were transcribed without alteration and, therefore, may deviate from the standard norm. The letter I indicates the intervention, that is, the reaction of each commenter to the news.

¹³ We will use the term commenter in order to make a distinction with the term commentator that evokes the notion of a specialized professional on a given subject.

impolite. This implies the use of inappropriate identity markers such as the use of nicknames in interactions in which there is no close relationship and very formal identity markers in close relationships. It is, therefore, a case of positive impoliteness. Furthermore, the reference to hallucination¹⁴ in the commentary invokes the supposed pathological nature of the president's behavior and calls into question his sanity. Despite not showing any direct mark of impoliteness, this passage can be considered so because it indicates a supposed mental incapacity of the president and the commenter does it through an implicature, that is, in an off-record way. Leech (2014) states that the implicature is an important resource in the marking of impoliteness, serving doubly the speaker's objective: to be offensive without appearing offensive, therefore, the impolite messages are often obtained by implicatures, and not by what is "said" (LEECH, 2014, p. 224). However, the implicature in this comment leaves no doubt that the commenter's goal is to achieve the positive face of the president.

Another way to demonstrate impoliteness is to associate someone or something that belongs to him or that he is part of with something of a negative nature. This is what occurs, for example, in the excerpt *What a video of total imbecility*, which indicates that the word imbecility is not being directed to the video, but to the person who produced it or who is represented in it. It is a case of positive impoliteness that materializes swearing as a strategic form of offense.

In the sequence, we observe that the emphasis is given to a supposed involvement of the president with actions considered illegal (The rotten connection with Queiroz, muzzling COAF). The action of highlighting the other's indebtedness is a case of negative impoliteness. The sarcasm or false politeness associated with the statement ends this first comment: *they are attacking the lion of morals and ethics*. It is possible to note that the words moral and ethics are obviously insincere when referring to the figure of the "lion," who in the video represents the president. The sarcastic sense is achieved through the inference made from the facts previously mentioned by the commenter that indicate the alleged dishonesty of the president. To say that someone values morals

¹⁴ Hallucination is a psychopathological manifestation that can present itself in psychotic patients, as specified in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD).

and ethics is axiologically positive in our culture. However, in the context, this does not seem to be the meaning conveyed and the questioning structure the information is disseminated with seems to reinforce this change in meaning.

Finally, the last part of the commentary presents a strategy of negative impoliteness in which the commenter claims for himself a position of “superiority,” a place from which he “advises” others to “pray and watch” so that they can be free from the supposed “blindness” (following the president) that affects them. This attitude is related to actions of condescending, advising and, for this reason, it can be inserted as a strategy of negative impoliteness, that is, to invade the other’s territory in offering something or to dictate what the other should do.

The sarcasm strategy also appears in the second comment analyzed (I2) in which the commenter suggests seeking some kind of agreement (positive politeness) through the expression *isn't it, Carluxa?* This inference is deconstructed by the context that invokes the figurative meanings of the words “lion” and “pussy,” which can be interpreted as a reference to the universe of homosexuality. In this context, such a reference represents the selection of a sensitive topic. This altered sense is reinforced by the inappropriate identity marker *Carluxa*, which refers to one of the president’s children. The two strategies mentioned are cases of positive impoliteness. In addition, there is an overlap of strategies here, since the mention of topics that are “secret” by one of the interactants also implies the invasion of the other’s territory and is configured as a case of negative impoliteness.

In the third intervention (I3), the commenter also uses the strategy of positive impoliteness related to the use of derogatory appointments *Bozoass* with a disqualifying objective. With this strategy of positive impoliteness, he associates the figure of the president with the figure of an animal (ass/donkey) in an attempt to imply Bolsonaro’s lack of intelligence. Also, he suggests with the vomiting metaphor the inability of the president say something that is considered relevant (off-record impoliteness).

Finally, it inserts a negative evaluation in relation to the performance of the *worst president in history* to diminish the figure of the president (negative impoliteness) as the main representative of a nation. Finally, the expression *for fuck's sake*, at the end of the comment, represents a conventionalized form of impoliteness generally associated

with particular contexts in which impolite effects occur (CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017). Expressions of this nature usually represent feelings of surprise or anger and are considered taboo terms (positive impoliteness) that should be avoided based on evaluative and prescriptive assumptions that are based on a certain standard of what is “correct,” “normal,” “appropriate,” “worth saying,” or “permissible” in a given social environment (CULPEPER, HARDAKER, 2017).

The fourth intervention (I4) also presents strategies of positive impoliteness materialized in the use of derogatory nominations (Bolso-ass, jackass nº 2). In this regard, Leech (2014) considers that animal metaphors are usually tailored to offensive use, functioning as emotional aggravating factors in the interaction. The comment also refers to a supposedly corrupt relationship between the president, his son, then deputy Flávio Bolsonaro, to whom the president refers as number 2 – therefore, the reference used by the commenter of No. 2 – and former adviser Fabrício Queiroz. With this strategy, the commenter seeks to highlight the indebtedness of the three people mentioned above (negative impoliteness). This attempt is made even more explicit by asking the question that ends the passage, *is it the syndrome of having their ass locked up on something* which mentions the types of behavior of those who have something to hide for having acted on a criminal or improper nature and which, therefore, must be kept confidential.

In the next reaction analyzed (I5), the commenter does not direct his attacks on the facts disclosed or the people mentioned in the news. He refers to the press, which he considers “rotten” and “filthy,” and to people affiliated with the left parties whom he calls “psychopaths.” This action by the commenter materializes yet again examples of positive impoliteness strategies made explicit through swears and derogatory nominations. This posture also marks the scenario of dichotomization and polarization that always emerges in discussions about the Brazilian political context.

Finally, the sixth reaction (I6) represents a case of off-record impoliteness, that is, a type of impoliteness strategy whose impolite effect is achieved through an implicature. In this comment, the commenter directs his evaluation to the other commenters and, in doing so, questions

their intellectual capacity, referring to the plural school.¹⁵ Such a position indicates a probable disagreement with this teaching model. The impolite effect is inferred from the commenter's consideration that, due to their malformation, the other interactants are unable to make relevant comments regarding the political scenario. The attempt to achieve the positive face of the other interlocutors is implicit, considering them unfit for the activity.

These impoliteness strategies used by the interlocutors signal *a priori* that the comments indicate a context in which dissent is a characteristic feature. In contexts like this, in which positions are generally exacerbated, there is a denial of collaboration rules and a strong attempt to discredit the opponent. According to Dascal (2008), this type of behavior can be characterized as "dichotomization," that is, "the radicalization of a polarity that emphasizes the incompatible nature of the two poles and the absence of any intermediate solution" (DASCAL, 2008, p. 35). To act in this context, the interactants mobilize various forms of discourse to achieve their goals.

To expand the possibilities of impoliteness analysis, we will present the Modular Approach to Discourse Analysis to demonstrate its potential for the investigation of the impolite acts, especially with regard to possible discursive maneuvers performed by the interactants in controversial contexts. We consider that how interactants manage their discourses may be an important element to investigate how impoliteness is built to reach the faces of alleged opponents.

3 Modular Approach to Discourse Analysis (MADA)

The Modular Approach to Discourse Analysis¹⁶ (MADA) is a theoretical-methodological interactionist approach that aims to account for the discursive complexity and heterogeneity. MADA proposes a unified framework consisting of three dimensions, namely: linguistic,

¹⁵ See Miranda (2007). Escola Plural was implemented in the municipal education system of Belo Horizonte, from 1993 to 1996. According to the author, the proposal was considered innovative by many, controversial by others, because it sought to break with the traditional culture of public schools. The proposal for this educational model can be seen at <http://www.pbh.gov.br/smed/escoplur/escplu00.htm>.

¹⁶ MADA emerged in the 1970s at the University of Geneva and is the result of research developed around Eddy Roulet.

situational, and textual. Each of these dimensions is constituted by modules¹⁷. The linguistic dimension incorporates the lexical and syntactic modules; the textual dimension contains only the hierarchical module, and the situational dimension includes the referential and interactional modules.

According to Roulet; Filliettaz and Grobet (2001), the notion of modularity is useful for the analysis of any discursive production because it allows the discourse content to be decomposed into several simple and autonomous information systems (modules), which can be described independently and later combined¹⁸ with other modules.

In addition to the modules, the authors also present five *complex organization forms* (resulting from the combination of information from the modules and some organization forms) and seven *elementary organization forms* (resulting from the combination of information provided by the modules). The *elementary organization forms* are: phono-prosodic, semantics, relational, informational, enunciative, sequential, and operational and the *complex organization forms* are: periodic, topical, polyphonic, compositional, and strategic. Each of these organization forms has specific information that must be combined and listed to meet the investigated purposes of each analyst.

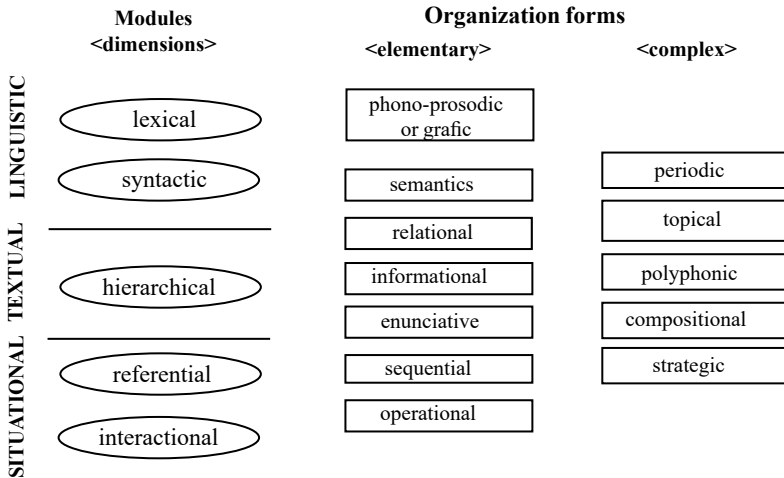
Finally, as Roulet (1999) points out, the model is a methodological proposal that isolates simple information systems, to later describe how this information can be combined, establishing complex relationships in the structure of discourses. Therefore, it is postulated that the objective of developing a model such as MADA “is twofold: (a) to develop a recursive model that uses a limited number of units, relationships, and general principles to (b) capture, accurately and broadly, the complexity of organizing all possible forms of discourse” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 41).

¹⁷ See Roulet; Filliettaz and Grobet (2001), the modules are descriptive resources that have the goal of providing information specific to a domain of the discursive organization in an exhaustive, consistent, economic, and independent way from the other modules.

¹⁸ See Roulet (1999, p. 146-147) *couplage* rules are responsible for ensuring the combination of discourse information, allowing to define the types of discursive constituents, the complex discursive categories, and also to derive the complex forms of discursive organization.

In this perspective, the potential of MADA as an analytical tool lies precisely in its ability to offer an accurate description of smaller units whose combination results in a robust framework of analysis on the production and interpretation of any discourse, as presented by Roulet, Filliettaz, and Grobet (2001) with the figure below (adapted).

FIGURE 1 – Modular Approach to Discourse Analysis



Source: Roulet; Filliettaz and Grobet (2001, p. 51).

As shown above, the modular model offers an integrating theoretical and methodological framework that allows the researcher to analyze different paths for the treatment of discursive complexity.

For this work, we focus on two forms of organization: the relational and the strategic. These forms of organization will be presented in more detail on topics 3.4 and 3.5 along with the information of the hierarchical and situational dimensions.

To meet the goal of analyzing the impoliteness and how it operates in the comments, we will first present the description of the situational dimension of the comments, emphasizing the interactional frame and the action frame. Subsequently, we will describe the hierarchical-relational structure to demonstrate the negotiation process that occurs in the comments and the relationships established between the speech

segments. Finally, this information will be coupled with information from the strategic organization form. Our objective is to demonstrate MADA's proposal for understanding the role of speech relations in the comments used by the interactants as strategies for managing faces, places, and territories.

3.1 The situational dimension: description of the contextual properties of comments

MADA is organized based on three components: the *linguistic*, the *textual*, and the *situational*. The situational dimension consists of two modules: the *interactional* and the *referential modules*. The *interactional module* deals with the materiality of the interaction. Considering that all interaction is established through a channel, which organizes the interactants among themselves in time and space and defines their possibilities of acting and retroacting, MADA proposes the definition of the materiality of the interaction through three parameters: the channel, the mode, and the type of the interaction link. With these parameters, it is possible to describe whether the interaction takes place through an oral, written, or gestural channel, or whether there is space-time co-presence, whether or not there is a possibility of reciprocity between the interactants. According to Cunha and Tomazi (2019), “the result of the study of the interactional module is a framework in which the materiality of the different interactional levels of which an interaction is constituted is expressed” (CUNHA; TOMAZI, 2019, p. 302).

The frame of the interaction analyzed here is represented in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2 – Interactional frame

journalist	commenter	character	character	commenter	commenter reader	readership
		written space-time distance non-reciprocity				
	written spatial distance, relative temporal distance reciprocity					
	written spatial distance, relative temporal distance non-reciprocity					
written space-time distance relative reciprocity						

Source: prepared by the author.

The interactional frame describes the interaction’s levels of blunting. At the most external level of the frame, there is the interaction that is established between the journalist Matheus Pichonelli, author of the article, and the reading public, possibly those interested in the content of the political universe. At this level, the channel is written, and there are space-time distance and relative reciprocity.

The relative reciprocity described here concerns the possibility of retroaction of one of the parts of the interaction, for example, Internet users generally react to the content disclosed in the media. However, the opposite rarely occurs, that is, the media or its representative does not respond to readers through a comment. For this, other tools or platforms, that do not fit our analysis, are generally used.

At the intermediate level of the table, the reader of the comments is represented. This third member is thus considered because he behaves as a spectator of the dialogue between the agentive instances of the interaction (CUNHA; TOMAZI, 2019), that is, the interaction between the commenters happens in the “presence” of this reader, who does not intervene verbally, but watches and monitors the action of the interactants. The interaction at this level is characterized by the written channel, spatial distance, relative temporal co-presence, and non-reciprocity. At this level, there is also an internal level in which the commenters dialogue, characterized by the written channel, spatial distance, relative temporal co-presence (the commenters can interact with each other in real time),

and by reciprocity. Finally, at the innermost level of interaction, there are the characters of the narrated universe. This level is characterized by the written channel, space-time distance, and non-reciprocity.

The information presented in the interactional frame is relevant to the study of conflictual interaction because it explains the possibilities and restrictions that the materiality of the interaction imposes on its participants in the development of their actions. According to Cunha, “the relevance of studying the materiality of the interaction lies in the impact it has on the development of the interaction” (CUNHA, 2019, p. 303). And we can see this in the coupling of this information in the study of the form of strategic organization.

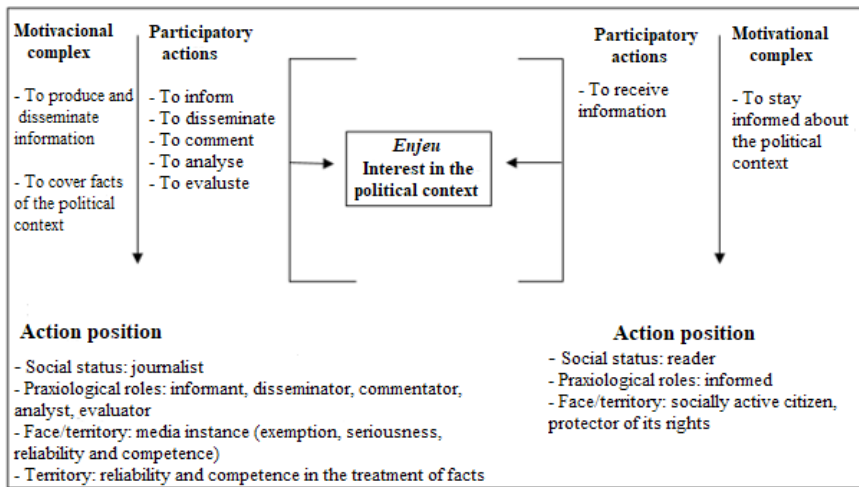
As mentioned, the situational dimension is also constituted by the *referential module*. This module is defined as “the elementary component of the modular model, specialized in describing the relations that the discourse has with the world in which it is produced, as well as with the worlds it represents” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 103). Specifically, the referential module seeks to account for “on the one hand, the linguistic and non-linguistic actions carried out or designated by the speakers, and, on the other hand, the concepts involved in such actions” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 103), seeking to portray the schematic representations (praxiological and conceptual) underlying the discourse and also the emergent representations (praxiological or conceptual) resulting from specific interactional situations.

The description of the properties of a specific interactional situation is made through the articulation of four parameters: the common *enjeux*, the participatory actions, the action positions, and the motivational complexes. The common *enjeux* designates what the interactants do together or the shared objective that articulates their commitment to collective action, while participatory actions refer to individual objectives, that is, “the interdependent portions of responsibility that are up to each of the interactants in the emergence of a common “*enjeux*” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 114). Action positions concern the representation of the identities of each interactant that are “negotiated” in the interaction. Regarding the position of the agents, it is worth noting that “the position in the interaction cannot be reduced to a single parameter, but it manifests at the same time in the form of social status, praxiological roles, and the face that is at stake” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ ; GROBET, 2001, p. 115). Finally, the motivational

complexes indicate the external reasons that motivated the participation of each interactant in a specific interaction. The authors also consider that “if the objectives appear as constitutive of the action and are the basis of its meaning, motives function as an “external framework,” a “background” that fixes their relevance” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 117). More precisely, the action frame seeks to “explain the fact that the discourse always functions as the place of convergence of a plurality of agentive instances involved not only in a common issue but also in activities external to the interaction that are momentarily associated” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001).

Based on this information, we will present two action frames for the interaction analyzed here. The first describes the interaction between the media, represented by the journalist, and the reading public. The table is presented below (Figure 3):

FIGURA 3 – Action frame of the interaction



Source: prepared by the author.

The purpose (*enjeu*) that motivates the interaction between journalist and the reading public is the interest of the political context. Regarding the motivational complex, on the one hand, there is the journalist who seeks to produce and disseminate information and, on the other, the reader who seeks to keep himself informed about the political

context. This relationship is marked by an asymmetry of power that ends up significantly defining the field of action of the interactants.

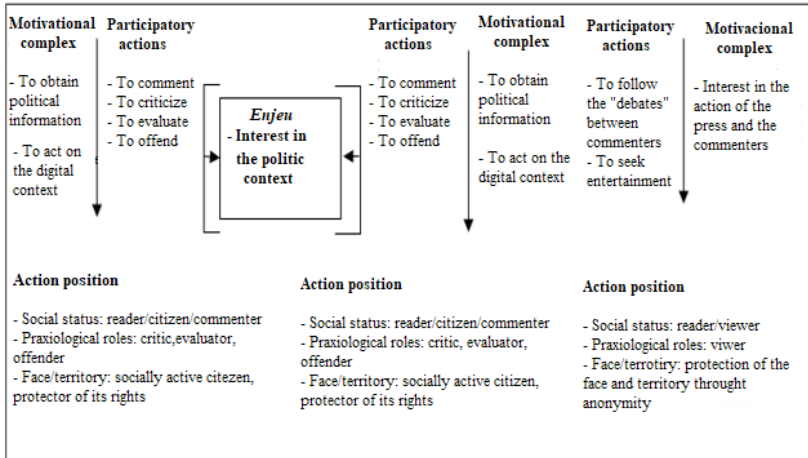
Regarding the media, the status of having a good (information) to which the reader supposedly does not have access guarantees the journalist a superior position in relation to his interlocutor. This asymmetry establishes a relationship of dependence between the reader and those who produce and disseminate information, and define the participatory actions of the journalist (informing, disclosing, commenting, evaluating, etc.) and his interlocutor (receiving information). The relationship between them also indicates that the journalist's field of action is broader with regard to praxiological roles. The status of a journalist gives its bearer the role of *informant*, *disseminator*, *commentator*, *analyst*, *evaluator*, while the praxiological role played by the reader is that of *informed* person, a more restricted social role. Subject to this relationship, the reader is more likely to be influenced by his interlocutor than the other way around and this influence may have consequences in terms of behavior patterns in the social environment.

However, due to the possibility of the relative reciprocity provided by the digital support between the interactants, the reader can retroact by disagreeing, commenting, or criticizing the facts presented to him by the journalist. The lack of response, in this context, testifies in favor of the stability of social status and the praxiological roles assumed by the interactants of the interaction, which makes it impossible for them to become more flexible.

Social status also refers to the face claimed by the journalist who refers to his authority as a media instance. In the modular analysis model, the notion of face is related to the interactive position of the interactants, to the notion of social status, and the praxiological roles of each one. Regarding the journalist, his face is related to the image of exemption, seriousness, reliability, and competence in the treatment of facts. Thus, all these elements related to his professional credibility constitute the territory that the journalist seeks to defend against possible attacks. In turn, the reader invokes for himself the image of a socially active citizen (which justifies his interest in politics) who is concerned with defending his rights and with citizen ethics.

The interaction analyzed here also includes the level at which the commenters dialogue. The second action frame that describes the internal level of interaction can be represented as follows:

FIGURE 4 – Second action frame of interaction



Source: prepared by the author.

The action frame above can be summarized as follows: the purpose (*enjeu*) of this interaction is interest in the political context. The motivational complexes of readers and commenters who dialogue at the most internal level of interaction are corresponding, as they demonstrate the interest of these interactants in obtaining information about the political context and in acting in the digital context. On the other hand, the motivational complex of the reader or viewer is related to his interest in the action of the press in the dissemination of facts and in the reaction of others in relation to these actions.

The status of each of them in the interaction (reader/commenter, reader/viewer) defines the participative actions (comment, criticize, evaluate, offend) of the reader/commenter and the actions of the reader/viewer (spectator, entertained person) and, consequently, their praxiological roles as a *commenter*, *critic*, *evaluator*, and *offender for the former* and *entertained person* and *spectator* for the later.

Regarding the management of faces and territories, the spectator reader seeks to protect his territory through non-action, since any action in this context is liable to a reaction on the part of an interlocutor. In this way, the reader/viewer also protects their positive face while remaining anonymous. On the contrary, readers/commenters seek to demonstrate through their comments that they are active citizens and concerned with

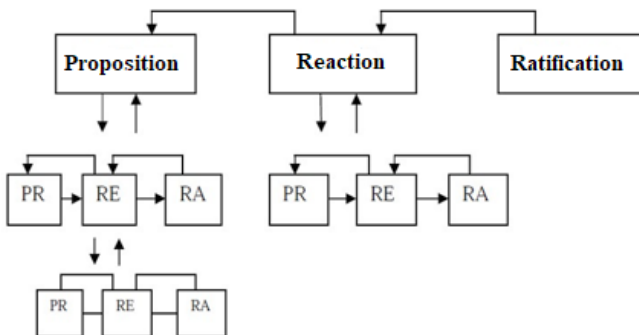
the political context and also protectors of their rights. Besides, the notion of the presence of a third participant (reader-spectator) enhances the action of readers/commenters both in the defense of “goods and rights” that may be common to them in the social environment and the attack on their supposed opponents.

Information from the situational dimension is relevant because it helps to understand the dynamics of the interaction. This dynamic is related to the attitude that may be assumed or not by the interactants due to their social status, the actions that may or may not be legitimized in a given context, and, finally, the maneuvers and the choice of strategies that each interactant can carry out according to their “position” in the interaction.

3.2 The hierarchical dimension: description of the constituents of the textual structure

The *hierarchical module*, which makes up the textual component alone, necessarily implies the notion of negotiation. That’s because Roulet; Fillietaz and Grobet (2001) start from the hypothesis that “every language intervention (greeting, request, assertion, etc.) constitutes a PROPOSITION that triggers a process of negotiation between the interactants” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 57). The negotiation process consists of three stages: proposition/reaction/ratification, as specified in Figure 5. These three stages constitute an exchange.

FIGURE 5 – Exchange process framework



Source: Roulet, Fillietaz and Grobet (2001, p. 57)

Cunha (2014, p. 39) exemplifies this negotiation process through a dialogue formed by a Proposition (question) *What time is it?*, complemented by a Reaction (answer) *It is nine o'clock*, and ended with a ratification (acknowledgment) *Thanks*. These elements (proposition/reaction/ratification) make up the hierarchical structure of any interaction.

As Roulet, Filliettaz, and Grobet (2001, p. 57-58) specify, every negotiation process is subject to two types of restrictions: that of dialogical completeness and that of monological completeness. The dialogical completeness concerns the scope of the double agreement that defines the closure of the negotiation process, while the monological completeness concerns the need for each phase of the negotiation process to be sufficiently clear and complete to enable the development of the negotiation. When one of the interactants considers that the information shared is unclear or insufficient, it is possible to open a secondary negotiation, “motivated by the need for clarification” (CUNHA, 2014, p. 41). In a conflictual interaction, for example, there is a recurrence of the lack of dialogic completeness due to the high recursion of counterarguments characteristic in this modality,¹⁹ which prevents the interactants from reaching the double agreement.

To study the negotiation process from a textual point of view, the hierarchical module proposes an important analysis tool: the hierarchical structure. This hierarchical structure, which serves to formally represent a negotiation process, is formed by three constituents: exchange, intervention, and act. Cunha (2014, p. 42) presents an important summary that defines these constituents:

Exchange: maximum textual unit formed by interventions that reflect the various propositions, reactions, and ratifications of a negotiation.

Intervention: a constitutive unit of exchange, which can be formed by just one act, but which usually presents a complex configuration, in which other interventions, acts, and even exchanges participate.

Act: minimum textual unit, which constitutes the smallest unit delimited by both passages of discursive memory.

¹⁹ For more details on how this negotiation process occurs in conflicting interactions, see Cunha (2019).

In addition to the three basic constituents presented above, the hierarchical structure also defines the relationships that are established between them. Roulet, Fillietaz, and Grobet (2001) postulate three types of relationships: dependency, interdependence, and independence. There is a dependency relationship “when the presence of one constituent is linked to that of another (but not the other way around): the dependent constituent, which can be removed without causing damage to the general structure, is considered subordinate, and the other is called principal” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 55). The interdependence relationship exists when one of the constituents cannot exist without the other. Returning to Marinho (2004), Cunha (2014) exemplifies this interdependent relationship with an exchange formed by question and answer, “since the answer depends on the question and vice versa” (CUNHA, 2014, p. 43). Finally, the relationship of independence exists “when the presence of each constituent is not linked to that of another” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 55).

By describing in detail the constituents and the position of one act in relation to the other, the hierarchical structure allows to “visualize” a mirrored version of what occurs in the interaction, showing, as Roulet, Fillietaz, and Grobet (2001) depict, the emerging face of a dynamic negotiation process.

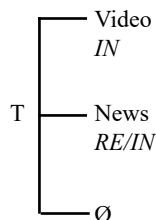
3.3 The form of relational organization

The relational organization form is an elementary organization form, resulting from the combination of information from the hierarchical, referential, and syntactic dimensions, which deals with the illocutionary relations and the generic interactive relations established between the constituents of a text. Illocutionary relations can be either: initiative (question, request, information) or reactive (response, ratification). Generic interactive relations mark the function and discourse relations that are established between an act in relation to its successor or predecessor. Discourse relations are: topicalization, reformulation, argument, preparation, succession, commentary, clarification, etc. Thus, initiatives or reactive illocutionary relations characterize the constituents that occur at the level of exchange; interactive relationships characterize the constituents of the intervention (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001).

The information from the description of the relational constituents indicates the predominant discursive relations in the text and can be combined with other forms of organization, which allow us to analyze complex forms of discourse (MARINHO, 2004), such as the strategic organization form, for example.

3.4 Analysis of the hierarchical-relational structure in the comments

The hierarchical-relational structure provides information not only in relation to the macrostructure of the exchange (proposition, reaction, ratification) but also of its microstructure, that is, the relationship between the constituents of each intervention. Regarding the macrostructure of the negotiation process, the interaction established between the media and the commenters is somewhat complex, since the news from which the analyzed comments arise is in an intermediate position in the negotiation process, representing a reaction to the video released by President Jair Bolsonaro on his social networks. Thus, the published video is an initial intervention that links the news through an initiative illocutionary relation of information (IN), while the news by journalist Matheus Pichinelli, published on the Yahoo News website, is a reactive intervention that relates to the video through a reactive illocutionary relation of response (RE), also serving as a source of information (RE/IN) for the comments that follow. There is no “identifiable” ratification in this negotiation process, which suggests that the negotiation could extend to new opinion articles, news, etc. through a continuous spiral effect. Thus, a controversial environment is presented, in which the actions are not aimed merely at the dissemination of information, but at a dispute of points of view that motivates the “chain disagreement” that, in turn, compromises the closing (ratification) of the negotiation process, that cannot be recovered. This negotiation process can be described as follows.



As we aim to analyze the comments published in response to the news, our focus will be on the intervention established from it (RE/IN). When starting a new proposition, the news is linked to the comments through an initiative illocutionary relation of information (IN), marked by the declarative turn and the position it has in the exchange structure. The comments that follow it are linked to it by a reactive illocutionary relation of response (RE). Although most comments are considered to be a reaction to the news, it appears that commenters do not behave in the same way, which, concerning the referential aspects of the organization of these speeches, may indicate that the motivations of these interactants are different and they relate not only to the information disclosed in the news but also to the particularities of the discursive universe of each of them.

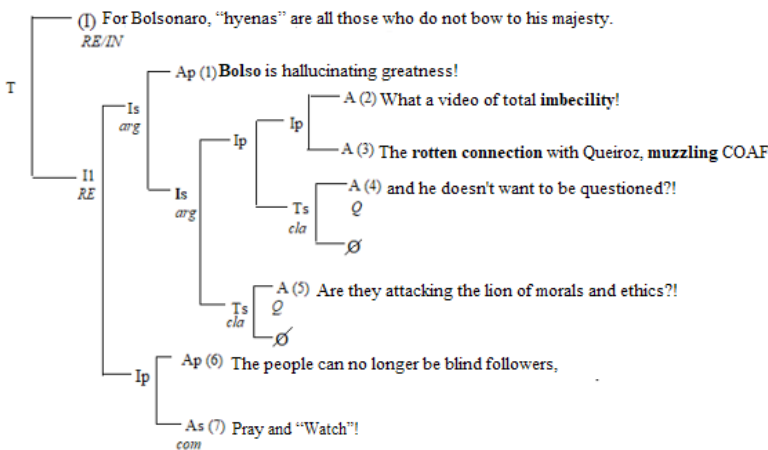
The news from which the comments follow is represented below by its title *For Bolsonaro, “hyenas” are all those who do not bow to his majesty*. The news represents the intervention (I) that initiates the negotiation process. The comments resulting from the news are identified by (I1, I2, ..), which represents each of the interventions. The numbers refer to the segmentation of the speech into acts. This division is necessary to determine the limit of each act, facilitating the visualization of the discourse relations between them.

- I1: (1) Bolso is hallucinating greatness! (2) What a video of total imbecility! (3) The rotten connection with Queiroz, muzzling COAF and (4) he doesn't want to be questioned?! (5) Are they attacking the lion of morals and ethics?! (6) The people can no longer be blind followers, (7) Pray and “Watch”!
- I2: (8) I've never seen a lion become a pussy's father, (9) isn't it, Carluxa?
- I3: (10) O BozoAss manages to be more regrettable with every new comment he vomits. (11) Worst president in history. (12) For fuck's sake.
- I4: (13) Funny thing is that Bolso-Ass and his jackass No. 02 don't talk about suing Fabrício Queiroz, (14) is it the syndrome of having their ass locked up on something?
- I5: (15) you from the rotten and filthy press (16) as well as the psychopaths of the left are hyenas

I6: (17) By the level of comments (18) we can already spot the profile of those who graduated at the time of plural school...

The figure below and the others represent, through the hierarchical-relational structure²⁰, the negotiation process established between the news and the commenters. With this structure, it is possible to visualize and understand how the speech segments of the comments are organized by the interactants to argue, comment, counter-argue, reformulate, etc. Subsequently, this analysis will allow us to understand the strategic functions of each of these segments in the management of faces, places, and territories.

The first exchange of the interaction presents the following hierarchical-relational structure:



The first intervention (I1), formed by acts [1-7], is linked to the news by a reactive illocutionary relation of response. In this intervention, the acts [1-5] represent a subordinate intervention in relation to the acts

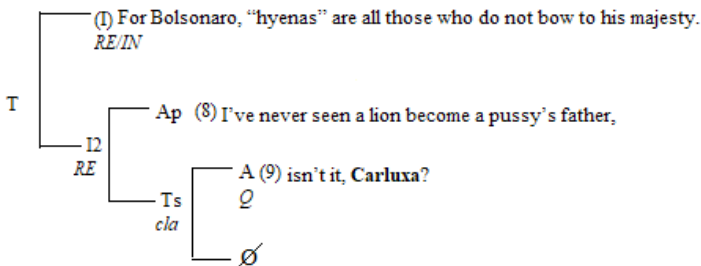
²⁰ Constituents: T = exchange, P = proposition; R = reaction; Q = question; Ap = main act; As = subordinate act; Is = subordinate intervention. Relational information: *arg.* = argument; *inf.* = information; *com.* = comment; *top* = topicalization; *cla* = clarification; *prep.* = preparation.

[6-7] that form the main intervention. Is [2-5] is linked to Ip [6-7] by an argumentative relationship, as it presents the justifications (hallucination, video publication with imbecile content, suspicious relationships of corruption, etc.) for which the people should no longer be blind followers of the president, information contained in the intervention Ip [6-7]. This discursive maneuver triggers the information of the discursive memory that originates from the content of the material, emphasizing that individuals must not want to follow a person who has axiologically negative behavior towards a certain social group (being imbecile, being lunatic, being dishonest, etc.).

Is [1-5] presents the following organization: Is [2-5] links to Ap [1] *Bolso is hallucinating greatness* through an argumentative relationship, presenting the justifications for the alleged hallucination of the president, that is, spreading an imbecile video, having suspicious political and personal relationships, not wanting to be questioned, etc. Ip [2-4] is superior in relation to Ts [5] which is linked to Ip [2-4] by a clarification relation. In turn, Ip [2-3] is formed by two acts coordinated with each other that highlight the questionable actions of the president. This intervention is the main intervention, and it is linked to Ts [4] through a clarification relationship.

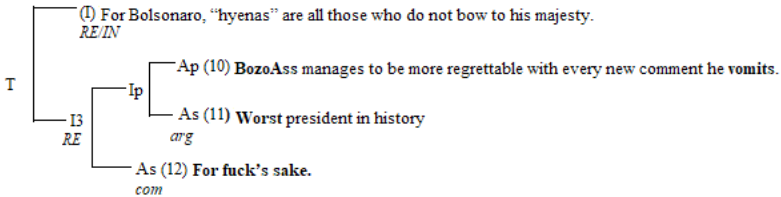
In Ip, formed by acts [6-7], act [6] is the main one and subordinates act [7] by presenting the most relevant information that the people should not be blind followers of Bolsonaro, while As [7] connects to Ap [6] through a commentary, suggesting a way to resolve the issue by *pray* and *watch*. This maneuver presented in As [7] triggers information from discursive memory related to the religious universe, according to which prayer is a way of solving worldly problems.

The description of the second exchange that constitutes the interaction can be represented as follows:



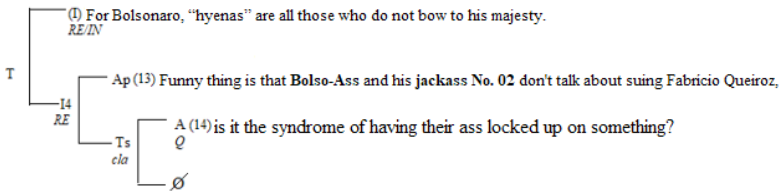
In intervention (I2), Ts is linked to Ap [8] through a clarification relationship. The Ts is marked by the syntactic structure of questioning *isn't it, Carluxa* in the act [9], that the commenter uses to seek confirmation from his supposed interlocutor and validate the information contained in the act [8] *a lion cannot be a pussy's father*.

The third exchange is represented as follows:



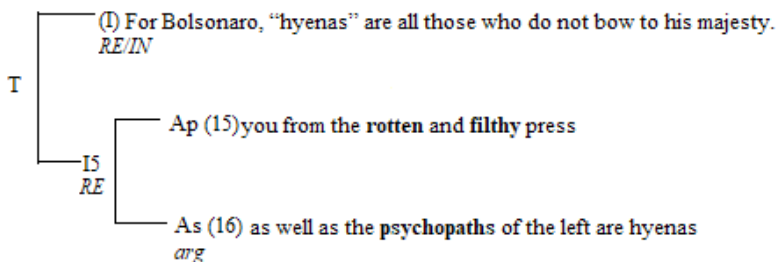
Intervention I3 is formed by As [12] and an Ip [10-11]. In Ip [10-11], Ap [10] presents a disqualifying metaphor for the president’s image: *he doesn't speak, he vomits*. The vomiting metaphor triggers discursive memory information around something considered negative and of very low value; Ap [10] subordinates As [11] which is linked to its precedent by an argument relation. The argument relation can be evidenced with the insertion of the connector, so between the acts [10] and [11], that is, “BozoAss manages to be more regrettable with every new comment he vomits *thus* he is the worst president in history.” Ip [10-11] subordinates act [12] which is linked to Ip by a commentary relationship.

The structure of the fourth intervention is as follows:



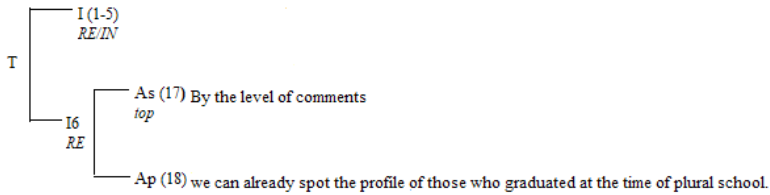
In intervention I4, Ap [13] is linked to Ts with a clarification relationship. In mentioning in Ap [13] the possible cases of corruption committed by the president, his son, and Fabricio Queiroz, the commenter triggers information from the discursive memory that comes from the facts mentioned in the news to present the suspicious relationship between the three. The information is reinforced with the questioning made in the act [14].

The structure of the fifth intervention can be represented as follows:



In intervention I5, As [16] is linked to Ap [15] by an argument relation marked by the connector *as well as*. With this information, the commenter not only marks his position contrary to the press that he considers “rotten” and “filthy,” but also adds with the additive marker *as well as* the specific instruction that “left psychopaths” are also considered “hyenas,” “rotten,” and “filthy.” The connector *as well as* also allows unifying the attacks against all individuals and agents considered opponents of the commenter. The information about the alleged opponents (press, left) is activated with the information from the discursive memory about the polarization of the political context and has as a source the immediate context of the commenter.

The description of the last intervention is as follows:



Finally, intervention I6 presents the As [17] shifted to the left that topicalizes the information in Ap [18]. The act [18] activates the discursive memory that has as a source the commenter's knowledge of the world in relation to the formal educational context and manifests the most relevant part of the commenter's position, to belittle the other commenters.

The discursive relations presented above will now be submitted to a new stage of analysis in which we will seek to highlight the role of each of them in the action of the interactants and how they manage their speeches for the maintenance and negotiation of faces, places, and territories.

4 The *face work* in the comments: analysis of the strategic organization form

As Roulet, Filliettaz, and Grobet specify, “the study of the strategic organization aims to describe how the writer or the interlocutors manage the relations of share positions and places in the discourse” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 351).

Regarding the analysis of the *figuration process*²¹, in which the interactants manage their interventions to manage social relations, the comments present a particularity in relation to this management. There is no express attempt by the commenters to “maintain the face,” on the contrary, the comments analyzed are characterized as discursive instances organized around verbal attacks punctually directed not only to the immediate interactants of the interaction, but also to third parties that

²¹ “Process by which the interlocutors employ discursive strategies belonging to different discourse organization plans to manage these relationships and negotiate identity images” (CUNHA; TOMAZI, 2019, p. 300).

the commenters somehow regard as their “opponents” and, therefore, deserving of their attacks.

Another issue that deserves attention in relation to the structure of comments concerns the fact that the comments present a pseudo-argument, characterized by very fluid and unproven information, which usually resume, alter or reinforce only what was disclosed by the journalist in the initial intervention, the news. Thus, the argument made by the commenters indicates that the action of each one of them does not demonstrate the intention of building a dialogue or debate aimed at defending a thesis or convincing an interlocutor. In general, the interactants seek to sustain their points of view only based on the disqualification of the supposed opponents. The absence of this interlocution, in this context, can be observed by the recurrence of several subordinate exchanges (which aim to open clarification among the interlocutors) in which the questions remain unanswered, reflecting little reciprocity between the interactants.

In I1, the commenter dialogues with the journalist, representative of the media, reacting to the information presented by him in the article. To this end, the commenter refers to the characters of the narrated world (Bolsonaro, Queiroz), building his intervention based on the information from the discursive memory provided by the story. Thus, the commenter assumes his status as a citizen to present with Is [1-5] his view of the facts and the arguments that aim to disqualify the figure of the president, namely, “to be hallucinated, to broadcast stupid videos, to keep suspicious relationships with justice investigators, etc..” “Be hallucinated, post stupid videos, maintain suspicious relationships with a person being investigated by the justice, etc.” The arguments are presented to support the thesis that people should no longer be blind followers of the aforementioned politician Ip [6-7]. In Is [1-5], act [1] demonstrates the commenter’s conviction in stating *Bolso*’s supposed hallucination. With this maneuver, the commenter attacks not only the positive face of the president with the use of inappropriate nominations *Bolso*, but also his negative face when invoking the existence of a possible mental disorder that would be affecting him. Is [2-5] presents the arguments that justify the belief of a possible hallucination. In Ip [2-4], the subordinate acts [2] and [3] emphasize the alleged evidence of his hallucination (publishing an imbecile video, having suspicious connections with accused persons, trying to silence a financial control body, etc.). This

commenter's position is an attempt to attack the aforementioned person's negative face, by relating him to axiologically negative aspects, such as corruption, for example, which is invoked through expressions such as *rotten connections*, *muzzling COAF*. When starting a clarification Ts in relation to Ip [2-3], the commenter strategically reinforces the idea of "Bolso's hallucination" in the act [4], that is, it can only be "hallucinated" someone who commits various types of misconduct and who still does not want to be questioned. The act [4] can be considered a rhetorical question that, given the absence of reciprocity between the commenter and those mentioned, will not be answered, but acts as a reinforcement for the facts mentioned in the previous acts. The same strategy is used with the other Ts started later in the act [5]. With that, the positive face of the president is once again attacked.

At the same time, the commenter also attacks the positive face of the president's followers, whom he considers being "blind followers," in As [6]. However, when considering the existence of the "blind follower," the commenter uses the word "the people" to refer to them. By avoiding the use of the pronoun "we," the commenter distances himself from this group, creating for himself the image that he is not "blind" as the others and that, for this reason, he can "see" the alleged misconduct of the president. By putting himself that way, the commenter claims for himself a superior position in relation to the others and that, for this reason, he can be condescending to them, offering them not only his "truth" but also his "advice" for the solution to the problem, *pray* and *watch*, in As [7]. The negative impoliteness strategy of condescending is used here by the commenter to claim for himself a positive image of those who care about others. However, this strategy can also be interpreted as a type of invasion of the other's territory in the offer of something that was not requested. Besides, the possibility of reciprocity among commenters seems to define the milder tone of Ip [6-7] since the commenter seems to recognize that being less offensive is a way to protect his face from possible attacks and reprisals by other interactants.

At I2, the commenter also reacts to the news, mentioning the characters of the narrated world. He uses Ap [8] to insert with an ironic tone the information whose content is threatening to the negative face of the mentioned person, as the information contained in this act activates the inference of homosexuality, which is used by the commenter who intends to strike the negative face of a third party, *Carluxa*, the president's

son. With this maneuver, the commenter invades the other's territory by emphasizing subjects that can be considered very particular, such as sexuality, for example. But, in doing so through irony, he benefits from the fact that irony can be interpreted, on the surface, as impolite. This seems to be the strategy used by the commenter in I2 with the insertion of the clarification Ts, used by the commenter to "simulate" seeking an agreement with his interlocutor, asking him for a "clarification." However, what this discursive relationship materializes is the insertion of the target to whom the attack is directed, that is, *Carluxa*. The irony is an important figuration strategy because it is considered to be more "ingenious, witty, or amusing than a direct case of impoliteness. An advantage of this strategy is that it improves the face of the ironic person while attacking the target's face" (LEECH, 2014, p. 235). However, regarding its effect, we consider that the more indirect forms of impoliteness should not be considered less impolite than the more direct forms, since they can have an offensive potential equal to or even greater than the more direct forms (CULPEPER, 2005). Furthermore, relative or unilateral reciprocity seems to favor the commenter/offender's face, because he can benefit from the absence of a counterattack to maximize his impolite action against his supposed opponents.

That's what seems to happen at I3 when the commenter attacks Bolsonaro's positive face three times. First, he uses the improper name *Bozo-ass* and the vomit metaphor to refer to his comments in Ap [10] and, later, he adds through the discursive argument relation, in Act [11], a conclusion in which it inserts a negative evaluation in relation to Bolsonaro's performance with the statement *worst president in history*. These actions are occasionally threatening to Bolsonaro's positive face. The first is threatening because it infers the president's reduced intellectual capacity, which constitutes a positive attack on his positive face (bald on record). In addition, as Leech (2014) specifies, "the animal metaphor is an aggravated insult" (LEECH, 2014, p. 226). In turn, the vomiting metaphor and other taboo terms that allude to sex, bodily excretions, among others, are generally used to enhance the rudeness of an expression, that is, "they can exacerbate the threat to the face" (LEECH, 2014, p. 230). The use of hyperbolic construction *worst in history* in the act [11] is used to depreciate the image of the president. Furthermore, in the act [12], the expression *for fuck's sake*, which is part of the taboo terms with the potential to aggravate the offense, serves here to express

a negative emotion of annoyance, irritation towards the president and his actions. In I3, the relations of places are very fluid, since the commenter, an ordinary individual, claims a higher place in relation to a member of the government, for example. We can see this with the performance of the commenter who, invested with his status as a citizen, can issue criticisms and assessments against someone who socially occupies a higher position in society, in this case, the President of the Republic. This fluidity in the relation of places is specified by Roulet, Filliettaz, and Grobet when they state that “the place is not an action configuration parameter, but a product of the interrelation” (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001, p. 353) and, therefore, a speaker can occupy a low place in relation to his interlocutor at the beginning of the interaction and gradually negotiate a higher place in relation to his interlocutor.

In I4, the commenter uses the derogatory name *Bolso-ass* and *jackass n° 2* (insulting animal metaphor) to refer to his foes in Ap [13], which constitutes a direct attack on their positive faces. The presence of the derogatory nomination in the main act also highlights the commenter’s intention to give greater weight/importance precisely to the attack on the positive face of those he mentioned. Besides, these metaphors are offensive because they activate, through the information of the discursive memory, a negative belief related to the insufficient intellectual capacity of these individuals. Their territories are also invaded in the mention made of an alleged dishonest action practiced by them. We also observe that the strategy of inserting a rhetorical question through a clarification relation in the act [14] is used by the commenter to question the conduct of those mentioned and not to ask for clarification. With this maneuver, the commenter seeks to enhance the attack on the positive face of the three people mentioned, suggesting that they hide actions considered criminal.

At I5, the commenter directs his attacks on two alleged groups of opponents, the press (rotten, filthy) and the members of leftist parties (psychopaths). With this maneuver, the commenter seeks to achieve the positive image of the journalist, representative of the media, questioning the seriousness of this professional and, consequently, his positive image. The reason for this is that the adjectives “rotten” and “filthy” detach from their “original” senses and trigger information from the discursive memory that, in this context, infer illicit and dishonest acts in relation to how the facts presented in the article were addressed. This strategy is characterized as a threat to the territory (reliability and seriousness

in the treatment of facts) of the journalist. About the relations of place, the commenter places himself in a superior position in relation to the journalist, and, invested by his status as a citizen, considers that he can criticize the conduct considered inappropriate by his interlocutor. The journalist, in turn, is embarrassed by the restrictions of interaction (absence of reciprocity), which prevent him from trying to regain his superior place, conferred by the status of media representative.

When using the marker “as well as,” the commenter adds “the psychopaths of the left,” who should also be considered in the group of “hyenas,” “rotten,” and “filthy,” who try to attack the image of the president. The term “psychopath” also refers to the pathological universe in which the commenter seeks to classify individuals belonging to the movements of the left as “sick,” in the pejorative sense of the term. The idea of polarization, which consists of establishing enemy fields, is triggered in this comment and reinforces the notion of “me” against the “other,” an honest and upright “me” that opposes the “other” (rotten, filthy, psychopath). This strategy can be understood as an attempt to reinforce the positive face of the commenter and at the same time an attack on the face of his opponents.

Finally, at I6, the commenter’s posture differs from other interventions. In this intervention, the commenter dialogues with the other commenters. Regarding the relations of place, he places himself in a superior place in relation to other commenters. This attitude is expressed in Ap [18] when he demonstrates a certain “contempt” for people trained in the plural school. As [17] topicalizes this information, marking the notion from which the commenter’s negative assessment is built. Thus, the commenter seeks to achieve the positive face of his interlocutors, discrediting the validity of his comments, due to a negative belief about his insufficient educational background. With this, the commenter also seeks to build for himself the positive image of someone “more educated” who is above the commenters considered “minor” and untrustworthy. At the same time, this type of behavior can indicate an absence of modesty which can testify against the positive face of the commenter when considered as someone arrogant or snobbish. In I7, despite not presenting the characteristic marks of an impolite act such as swearing, threats, insults, etc., the impolite effect is achieved through an implicature that invokes the negative belief that unschooled people are less capable than others, that is, the discredit launched on people helps to deconstruct the validity of their speech.

Final considerations

In this work, we show from two theoretical approaches, namely, the perspective elaborated by Culpeper (1996, 2005) and the discursive-interactionist approach of modular analysis (MADA) (ROULET; FILLIETTAZ; GROBET, 2001), the strategies used by interactants in the digital environment for the management of faces, places, and territories. The analysis indicates that the commenters' action in making their comments is not characterized by a figurative process that aims to mitigate the offensive degree of the interaction. Rather, it is clear that commenters are motivated to deliberately promote the offense, seeking to reach the face of their supposed opponents. This is expressed by the high recurrence of impoliteness strategies identified in all interventions as opposed to the lack of politeness strategies. Thus, comments tend to be configured as a vector of impolite behavior, especially comments related to the political context, indicating a strong social polarization and an imbalance in social relations between supposedly opposite groups.

Regarding the management of faces, territories, and places, it is clear that there is a tendency to materialize attacks on the positive face of interactants through inappropriate nominations, swearing, the use of taboo terms, insulting metaphors, etc. This tendency is revealed not only by the identification of strategies of impoliteness but also by the relations of discourses that indicate that a clarification relationship between two acts, for example, may be used as a strategy to attack the face of others and not as a mere request for clarification. Also, the interactants act not only to attack the faces of others but also seek to maintain a positive image before others.

The interactional restrictions to which the interactants are subject seem to contribute significantly to the action of each one of them, sometimes making it possible to potentiate the impolite act, through swears and pejorative metaphors, sometimes offering the necessary "protection" so that they feel free to offensive practice, without the possibility of being counterattacked. Furthermore, based on the social statutes claimed by them, commenters seek to act by criticizing, evaluating, judging, and seeking to change the places and images they have of themselves and others in the interaction.

The analysis of all these aspects indicates that impoliteness can be investigated beyond the simple classification of the acts as polite or impolite. The analysis from the contextual, referential, and textual aspects, based on the resources provided by MADA, can significantly expand the study of impolite acts by offering methodological support for investigating the action of interactants in conflictual interactions. This is how MADA can expand the analysis of impoliteness: providing more precise instruments for verifying impoliteness in different contexts.

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