Lexical selection and construction of argumentativeness in journalistic texts /
Seleção lexical e construção da argumentatividade em textos do domínio jornalístico

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the argumentative positioning of comments on the 2018 elections, focusing on the use of items from the lexical system. The corpus is of twelve texts analyzed in a qualitative, descriptive and documentary research. It is evenly composed of the text genres opinion pieces and editorial. All texts were published by the three main newspapers of the city of Recife during the second round of the 2018 elections. The focus is on the way in which nouns, adjectives and verbs linked to the theme of elections acted as contextualization cues (GUMPERZ, 2013) for the construction of the argumentative direction of the journalistic domain as a whole. We draw on a socio-interactional conception of language and lexicon (ANTUNES, 2012; MARCUSCHI, 2003; 2004; CARDOSO, 2015). Within our sample, we find a close relationship among the text genre, the definition of the author's position and the choice of lexical items related to the topic under debate in a text.

KEYWORDS: *Lexical selection; Argumentation; Textuality; Journalistic Texts; Verbal interaction.*

RESUMO

Este trabalho tem como objetivo analisar o posicionamento argumentativo de textos de comentário sobre as eleições de 2018, com foco no emprego de itens do sistema lexical. Em uma pesquisa qualitativa, descritiva e documental, foi analisado um *corpus* de doze textos, igualmente divididos entre os gêneros artigo de opinião e editorial, publicados pelos três principais jornais da imprensa recifense no período do segundo turno das eleições de 2018. Nesse conjunto de textos, deu-se foco ao modo como substantivos, adjetivos e verbos ligados ao tema das eleições atuavam como pistas de contextualização (GUMPERZ, 2013) para construção do direcionamento argumentativo do domínio jornalístico como um todo. Partimos, para isso, de uma concepção de língua e de léxico de base sociointeracional (ANTUNES, 2012; MARCUSCHI, 2003; 2004; CARDOSO, 2015). No universo de nossa amostra, constatou-se uma estreita relação entre o gênero textual, a definição do posicionamento de seu autor e a escolha dos itens lexicais relativos ao tema em debate no texto.

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1 Introduction

Journalistic writing is an activity whose analysis reveals several dimensions of its argumentative construction. Specifically, this paper aims to analyze texts' position-arguments about the 2018 elections, focusing on the use of items from the lexical system. Therefore, our idea is to expand the possibilities of analyzing the lexicon, in a textual-interactive perspective, showing how the interactional functionality of texts guides their linguistic formatting, especially in the lexical dynamics of materiality construction.

Choosing the journalistic domain is justified by the possibilities of linguistic construction offered by the newspaper texts, which, in comparison with other domains, should, at least in theory, be written with more attention to the selection and use of lexicogrammatical elements, since they are supposed to be public texts. Furthermore, the social representation of the journalistic domain increases the importance of these texts in the recording of events and ideas, which is accentuated in argumentative texts. Therefore, we chose, among the textual genres of the journalistic domain, two of the most argumentatively representative: the opinion piece and the editorial. The two different genres were selected in order to vary the sample, although opinion pieces and editorials present similar characteristics in content, organization and structure, being different only because of one aspect of interaction: authorship.

We carried out a general analysis of the argumentativeness in the texts of the collected sample, mainly highlighting the positions revealed in the texts according to the textual genre. This overview is important to understand how the use of lexical items is also linked to the discursive domain, following greater contingencies of verbal interaction.

2 Methodological aspects of the research

The adopted methodological path led us to choose a domain, the journalistic one, as previously explained, for the *corpus* elaboration, which, according to Polguère (2016), can be established from a set of texts, including journalistic ones. Following the criteria proposed in Seixas (2009), we understand this domain as the sphere of social circulation in which journalistic genres, such as news, reports, opinion pieces and editorials, are characterized by their institutional importance and their informative and opinionated functionality. In addition, the topics in these texts are based on universal and everyday themes, such as the presidential elections. The relationship among author, text and reader occurs at the very moment of reading, since the author and the reader do not know each other or establish other social relationships, except at the very moment of contact with the text.

Based on our definition of the discursive domain, we proceeded to choose the newspapers from which we would collect the texts. We chose the 3 (three) main newspapers from the state of Pernambuco: *Diário de Pernambuco* (DP), *Jornal do Commercio* (JC) and *Folha de Pernambuco* (FP). We collected texts published in both the printed and the online versions of the newspaper. In the group of texts in the journalistic domain, we analyzed the so-called comment texts, defined by Antunes (1992; 1996) as a subtype of the argumentative text.

The next step for establishing the *corpus* was the thematic approach. We chose a topic that was quite evident at the time of our collection: the 2018 presidential elections. We specifically selected the texts published between October 8th and 27th in 2018, during the time related to the second round elections.

After defining the period of publication of the texts of the *corpus*, we collected all opinion pieces and editorials from newspapers during the second round elections. Thus, a total of 79 (seventy-nine) texts were gathered, from which 12 (twelve) texts were chosen for the definitive sample, considering the word count and previous analysis of lexical representation and respecting the established divisions (2 copies of each textual genre, in each newspaper). These texts had approximately the same proportion of orthographic words, so the sample could be compared by equivalence of size.

For each of the 12 (twelve) texts of the definitive sample, we assigned a code with indications of the textual genre (OP for opinion piece and ED for editorial), the newspaper (DP, FP or JC) and the

number of occurrence (1 or 2, respecting the chronology of the publication date to define this number). Thus, for example, the text OP-JC-02 corresponds to the second opinion piece of the *Jornal do Commercio* within the definitive sample, while the text ED-DP-01 corresponds to the first editorial of the *Diario de Pernambuco*, and so on.

After selecting and organizing the texts, we identified the cases of nouns, adjectives and verbs that referred to the central theme of the collected editorials and opinion pieces: the 2018 presidential elections. Based on the theme and on the assumed theoretical postulates, we interpreted the functioning of these lexical items in the textualization process.

Methodologically, our study takes an eminently qualitative and interpretive approach (PAIVA, 2019). As regards to our general objective, this research is considered descriptive. While analyzing the sources, our paper has a documentary perspective.

3 Our conception of lexicon

This section offers a broad view of the historical process that was constituted in Linguistics, in the theories focused on the study of the lexicon. The examination of the main lexical theories, in this inquiry, reveals the existence of three major adopted concepts of lexicon in research, the first two being extremely recurrent in the studies, until nowadays, and the third one that is proposed in Neves (2020), understood as an apparatus of analysis that provides a more social-interactional view for the study of the lexicon.

Antunes (2012, p. 27, our translation) provides us with a definition of lexicon as "[...] the wide repertoire of words in a language, or the set of items available to speakers to meet their communication needs"[†]. This summarizes some of the definitions that discuss the dimension of the lexicon in the language. From this overview brought by the author, we point out three main lexical system concepts.

At first, we realize that the lexicon is understood as a set of words that constitute the repertoire of language users. In this way, the lexicon is treated from a structural point of view, which tends to

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[†] Original: "[...] o amplo repertório de palavras de uma língua, ou o conjunto de itens à disposição dos falantes para atender às suas necessidades de comunicação".

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guide its conception as a list of words in which morphological, syntactic and, sometimes, semantic phenomena act.

The second aspect is that, in this set, it is observed that the words are available to the speakers, which points to a cognitive, schematic ability of the language users to store this list of words in an organized way. This understanding leads to the formulation of a cognitive conception of the lexicon, which will be understood as a system of matrices from which we store activated and reactivated data in textual processing (during the interactional course, regarding social cognition).

In a third aspect, the activation of these matrices responds to the communication needs imposed by the verbal interaction for the formulation of the texts with which we perform verbal actions. Furthermore, it is the sharing of social experiences that enables interaction and allows interlocutors to build textuality together, using, for this, lexical competence (among others). These considerations provide the formulation of a textual-interactive perspective for the study of the lexicon.

Thus, we raise some postulates to conceive this textual-interactive conception of lexicon, which is rarely used within Lexicology so far. The main postulate is the understanding that the meaning of lexical items is interactional. Following the ideas of Marcuschi (2004, p. 264, our translation), we agree that "understanding is always understanding in the context of a relationship with the other who is situated in a culture and in a historical time and this relationship is always marked by an action. Therefore, perhaps the greatest methodological and epistemological shift is from the relationship to the action"‡. With the meaning and functioning of words, then, it could not be different, considering that, when choosing a certain lexical item to elaborate their text, a language user does so from the factors that determine the interaction.

We begin to stop understanding the lexicon as a system defined in the exact relationship between language and reality, or even between strictly linguistic elements, and begin to perceive its role in the actions that the interlocutor performs when making use of a certain lexical item. Therefore, we understand that the only way to analyze lexical dynamics, with all its complexity, is through the text,

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‡ Original: "Entender é sempre entender no contexto de uma relação com o outro situado numa cultura e num tempo histórico e esta relação sempre se acha marcada por uma ação. Assim, talvez o maior deslocamento metodológico e epistemológico seja o da relação para a ação".

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seen as a process of verbal interaction. The mechanisms that lead to the processing of ideas through the lexicon correspond to the lexical selection criteria, all of an interactional, extralinguistic nature.

4 Lexicon, textual genre and discursive domain

The lexical items used in a text follow specific rules of use for each genre, these ones coming from a larger element, which is the social field in which this text circulates, its discursive domain (MARCUSCHI, 2008).

We acquire lexical words in situations of use related to the contexts of circulation of texts. Knowing a lexical item is only fully possible if we understand its significant effects in the various textual genres in which it takes place within its discursive domain. This happens because the context, emanating from the discursive domain, provides a framework that delimits certain social-interactional uses of the word, and it is from this level that the meaning of both the text and the words that are part of it begins to be constructed.

Cardoso (2015) explains the textualization process as an appropriation that the enunciator makes of the linguistic material at their disposal, considering the type and genre of the text requested by the ongoing interaction, the situation raised by this genre and the type of audience from which their interlocutors come. Therefore, for the text analyst, it is necessary to take "[…] into consideration [that] the [textual] genre and the formation of lexical-semantic fields can result in different forms of text analysis, targeting the lexical choice [...]"[§] (CARDOSO, 2015, p. 118, our translation). This is the reason why the characterization of the interaction situation is an essential element for the analyst to understand the functionality of the lexicon in its real dimension.

Conceiving the textual genre as the "[...] texts materialized in recurrent communicative situations"[**] (MARCUSCHI, 2008, p. 155, our translation), we understand that it is this recurrence of interactions that contributes to the speaker, through their social experiences, to start associating certain

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[§] Original: "[...] em consideração [que] o gênero [textual] e a formação de campos léxico-semânticos pode resultar em formas diferentes de análise de textos, tendo por alvo a escolha lexical [...]"

[**] Original: "[...] textos materializados em situações comunicativas recorrentes"

lexical items with some specific contexts. However, these experiences, organized in genres, still follow the social rules of a larger context, the discursive domain, which, for Marcuschi (2008),

> [...] constitutes much more a 'sphere of human activity' in the Bakhtinian sense of the term than a textual classification principle and indicates *discursive instances* (for example: legal discourse, journalistic discourse, religious discourse, etc.). It does not cover a particular genre, but generates several of them, as genres are institutionally marked. They constitute discursive practices in which we can identify a set of textual genres that are sometimes their own or specific as institutionalized communicative routines that establish power relations (MARCUSCHI, 2008, p. 155, author's emphasis, our translation).[††]

Thus, lexical items genesis, in the process of textualization, firstly goes through the discursive domain, and only then resorts to the communicative situation and genre. It is noticeable the existence of typical words, for example, from the pedagogical sphere, such as 'booklet', 'test', 'study', 'assess', 'correct', 'student' etc. This group of lexical items is associated, forming the lexical fields linked to each area of knowledge. It is also worth remembering that the analysis of these items, as only a list of words that circulate in similar contexts, is not enough for a more effective understanding of lexical dynamics, given that only the observation of the specific interaction situation (which can be partially reproduced by the analyst) is what provides all the complexity with which the lexicon builds its effects and meanings.

There are lexical items that eventually circulate in different discursive domains, corresponding to different meanings in each of them. For example: the lexical item 'candidate' will acquire a meaning in the interpersonal domain, in an anecdote, that is different from the one in the journalistic domain, as in an editorial. The interpersonal domain, firstly, by referring to less monitored everyday situations, already allows some more colloquial meanings and interpretations for the lexical item 'candidate', allowing that, in an anecdote text, the word can be used for purposes of mockery and humor. In the journalistic domain, the use of this term loses a lot of significance probability, and that is amplified, for

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[††] Original: "[...] constitui muito mais uma 'esfera da atividade humana' no sentido bakhtiniano do termo do que um princípio de classificação de textos e indica instâncias discursivas (por exemplo: discurso jurídico, discurso jornalístico, discurso religioso etc.). Não abrange um gênero em particular, mas dá origem a vários deles, já que os gêneros são institucionalmente marcados. Constituem práticas discursivas nas quais podemos identificar um conjunto de gêneros textuais que às vezes lhe são próprios ou específicos como rotinas comunicativas institucionalizadas e instauradoras de relações de poder"

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example, when it is in an editorial, which is a text that requires a more serious attitude regarding the chosen information and the vocabulary selection, due to its social representation.

Based on these ideas, Marcuschi (2004, p. 272, our translation) states that "[t]he lexicon is just an indicial system and the calculation of theses indices for referential determination is done in the discourse"‡‡. We must, therefore, think about the domain of this text that is understood as a selective criterion closely linked to the context. If we think of lexical items as contextualization cues, as can be proposed in a textual-interactive conception, we can always interpret them according to the context in which such items are found.

Each textual genre formulates in the interlocutors certain construction schemes that are defined in the interaction. Within these schemes, lexical items are selected as the greatest linguistic expression of the elements of the interaction. Analyzing the use of the lexicon in different contexts of use, Marcuschi (2003, p. 9) makes us interpret:

> Note, for example, that the lexical functioning for the meaning production, referential continuity and topical organization in *cooking recipes* and *medicine leaflets* differs greatly in comparison to *jokes*, *interviews*, *short stories* etc. [...] It is not exactly the lexical selection that produces the effect of meaning and the topical organization, but a certain "contamination" produced by a ***topical framework*** that submits the entire referential system to an interpretative reorientation (MARCUSCHI, 2003, p. 9, author's emphasis, our translation).§§

The demand for lexical items, then, is already a mark in which the general organization of the text is reflected. Each word chosen to compose the textual surface has a function in guaranteeing this organization. The emerging meaning effect from these lexical items, however, is not in the vocabulary selection itself (it is just a clue to contextualizing these effects), but in the very frame that is made

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‡‡ Original: "O léxico é apenas um sistema indiciário e o cálculo desses indícios para determinação referencial é feito no discurso"
§§ Original: "Observe-se, por exemplo, que o funcionamento do léxico para a produção de sentido, continuidade referencial e organização tópica em receitas culinárias e bulas de remédio difere muito em relação a piadas, entrevistas, contos etc. [...] não é propriamente a seleção lexical que produz o efeito de sentido e a organização tópica, mas sim uma determinada "contaminação" produzida por um enquadre tópico que submete todo o sistema referencial a uma reorientação interpretativa"

possible by the text, which, in turn, already replicates larger frames, elaborated in the interactions of each domain.

Marcuschi (2004) brings as an example the genre soap opera summary. The presumed interlocutor of this text genre reads it because they already follow the unfolding plot of the soap opera. Thus, it is expected that the interlocutor already knows the characters involved in the actions and the facts that have already occurred before the publication of the summary. This eliminates the need to make this information explicit in the text. Therefore, the lexical items in this text genre, especially the nouns, will not need other items nor contextualization to be understood (not only at the level of basic meaning, but, especially, in their functionality in the text). Therefore, this configuration is already recurrent in the context and reflects a frequent interaction in the text of the interpersonal domain, which is the familiarity of subjects and themes shared by the interlocutors.

5 Global analysis of lexical items in opinion pieces and editorials: argumentativeness in the journalistic domain

Drawing on our theoretical framework, we will do a general analysis of the ideas that were built within the texts in our sample, so that we can understand the construction of broader points of view in these texts, which is a central element for the construction of argumentativeness. By understanding how our dataset of editorials and opinion pieces construct its argumentative orientation through the lexical system, we can make inferences about this comprehensive positioning in the journalistic domain.

The interactional aspect that we observed at the beginning was the thematic construction of the texts, which occurred through the alternation between thematic axles that corresponded to the type of sub-themes of the larger subject: the elections. By establishing a specific link with the second round elections, the lexical items were organized around four axes, namely: (a) the electoral process, when the texts dealt with the election itself, sometimes through typical procedures of electoral activities, sometimes through elements associated with it; (b) candidates and parties, when dealing with participants in the electoral process or their party organizations; (c) the previous situation in the country,

when they referred the elections to the possibility of changes, highlighting what happened in the country before the 2018 electoral process; and (d) the subsequent situation in the country, when they referred the elections to the possibility of changes, highlighting what would happen in the country after the 2018 electoral process.

The focus on one of the thematic axes or even the movements of passage from one axis to another established relationships with the presupposed objective of the text, taking into account, above all, its interlocutors and its communication vehicle. Briefly, these four axes focused on the election discussion itself or each of the presidential candidates. From this thematic construction, we observed that the argumentative orientation sometimes focused on the elections, trying to convey an idea of neutrality, or focused on the defense of one of the two candidates, in a more explicit position of opinion, albeit not totally.

The argumentative orientation of the texts was therefore based on the polarity established in the 2018 Elections since the first round, but more intensively in the second one. On the one hand, the candidate Fernando Haddad[***], a left-wing representative; on the other, the PSL[†††] candidate, a right-wing representative. The lexical items related to each of the presidential candidates represented the position of the author of the text or the vehicle in relation to the elections, which did not always coincide with what was explicitly assumed in the text.

Regarding the six opinion articles, we found 2 (two) different positions that were more easily identifiable: in 4 (four) texts, there was an indication of support for Haddad's candidacy, most of the time from criticisms to the PSL candidate; in 2 (two) texts, there was no explicit support for any of the candidates, with the columnist's focus on the defense of the electoral process. In the case of the six editorials, this picture is reversed, with 2 (two) positions identified: in 5 (five) texts, the theme is centered on the elections, discussing aspects such as citizenship and ethics; in 1 (one) text, there is declared support for the candidate who ended up being elected, with a criticizing opinion about PT. All these points of view are summarized schematically (Table 1), below:

[***] Haddad was part of PT, which stands for '*Partido dos Trabalhadores*'.
[†††] PSL stands for '*Partido Social Liberal*'.

Table 1: Positions identified in the corpus.

TEXTS	Pro-Haddad	About the elections	Pro-Bolsonaro
Op-Eds	OP-DP-01 OP-DP-02 OP-FP-01 OP-JC-01	OP-FP-02 OP-JC-02	---
Editorials	---	ED-DP-01 ED-DP-02 ED-FP-01 ED-FP-02 ED-JC-01	ED-JC-02

Source: Prepared by the author of this article.

Regarding these positions, it is important to highlight that we are not always dealing here with explicit positions, considering that, in some cases, the information selection and words revealed that, even when the thematic focus revolved around the elections, there was an implicit positioning that ended up shifting the text from one argumentative axis to another. This helps to prove the view that there are no impartial or neutral texts, and the lexicon is a relevant textual cue to discover the positions of the authors of a text.

Focusing on the differences in the opinion construction between the textual genres, the fact that, in the editorials, we find more texts whose theme was developed on the electoral process, without declaration of support for any candidate, is related to the very social function of the genre. As it represents a collective, institutional opinion, the editorial cannot, in theory, assume a political stance explicitly oriented towards any candidate or party, given that the journalistic institution must deal with different audiences, in addition to not being in its interest to commit itself politically with any candidate. However, although there was no explicit identification of position, we found cases in which, through the vocabulary choice and the information selection, the link between the text and the support for the candidate Fernando Haddad was perceived.

In the opinion piece, the position of the author of the text is more explicitly perceived, although we also found cases in which the actual opinion of the writer was not exactly explicit. This is, for example, the orientation of the text OP-DP-01, by Maurício Rands, in which the author declares the vote for Fernando Haddad and highlights several negative aspects of the PSL presidential candidate, but, in the lexical choice made to refer to the PT and its candidate, reveals that it does not necessarily support that candidacy. The argumentativeness in this textual genre, then, is subject to other interactional aspects, such as the positive face or the enunciator's social positioning, who often cannot commit to what it is said.

Briefly, with regard to the candidates, we did not find any text that made an open defense of any of the candidates in an explicit way. The lexical items that indicated support for a particular political vision did not do so in a way that highlighted positive aspects of their candidate, but rather highlighted the negative aspects of the opposing candidate, especially when the values of democracy and authoritarianism were opposed. In this sense, lexical items such as "authoritarian" and "democratic" were evident in the texts, as ways of tracing the profiles of these candidates. Regarding the electoral process as a whole, the highlight was that almost all the discussion about the possible results of the polls revolved around the past, based on the strategy of remembering facts that occurred in times of dictatorship in Brazil as a warning sign for what was announced in the elections. Thus, lexical items such as 'dictatorship' and 'authoritarian' were frequent in the texts, as well as expressions such as 'times of lead', to recall negative events in the history of our country.

Overall, we found texts whose argumentative position was aimed at political support for left-wing politics and recognition of democracy values in the electoral process, which is confirmed in the lexical selection established in the text. Specifically in opinion pieces, we were able to perceive a closer relationship among the author's social profile, indicated in the initial part of the text, before their opinion, their argumentative orientation and the choice of lexical items. In other words, the textual genre established differences in the argumentative orientation and, consequently, in the vocabulary selection, since the words used in the opinion pieces were more explicitly evaluative than in the editorials.

Conclusion

The verbal interaction elements are essential for the reader to make associations between the use of words and other textual dimensions, such as the supposed intentionality that they perceive from the text's author, the inclusion of this text in a broader context, the time when the text was produced etc. Since reading depends on multiple factors, including the knowledge that the reader has of the author's profile (in the case of opinion pieces) or of the newspaper (in the case of editorials), there are many possibilities of interpretations that can be given to the words' meanings. In describing our data, our focus turned to understanding how, in this reading process, lexical selection helps in the elaboration of the inferences allowed by the text. We emphasize that we understand lexical items in their role as contextualization cues (GUMPERZ, 2013), since we defend the idea that a reader does not interpret exactly the meanings of the words, but the non-intentions behind their use, and also the intentions, considering that understanding is guided not only by the author's bias, but by other verbal interaction factors, such as the theme, the argumentative orientation and the context, which are prominent elements in our analysis.

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