

Strategies of Re-Elaboration of the Past and the Authenticity of Speech Acts of Political Atonement / *Estratégias de reelaboração do passado e a autenticidade de atos discursivos de expiação política*

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the question of authenticity in speech acts of political atonement from a critical discourse analysis perspective. The objective is to study how strategies of re-elaboration of the past employed in atonement discourses may contribute to assess the authenticity of speech acts of political atonement. The paper tackles the following research question: how do strategies of re-elaboration of the past influence the authenticity of a speech act of political atonement? The paper analyses a 2015 statement by Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe. The paper argues that former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's 2015 speech act of political atonement endorsed a strategy of cancellation. The paper claims that supporting such a strategy prevented Abe's 2015 speech act of political atonement from being considered a genuine speech of political atonement.

KEYWORDS: Speech acts of political atonement; Apologia; Strategies of re-elaboration of the past; Critical Discourse Analysis; Memory

RESUMO

A partir da perspectiva de uma análise crítica do discurso, este artigo analisa a questão da autenticidade nos atos discursivos de expiação política. O objetivo é estudar de que forma a autenticidade dos atos discursivos de expiação política pode ser avaliada através de estratégias de reelaboração do passado empregadas em discursos de penitência. O artigo enfrenta a seguinte pergunta de pesquisa: de que forma estratégias de reelaboração do passado influenciam na autenticidade de um ato discursivo de expiação política? O artigo analisa uma declaração de 2015 proferida por Shinzō Abe, antigo primeiro-ministro do Japão, e argumenta que, no seu ato discursivo de expiação política de 2015, ele desenvolveu uma estratégia de cancelamento da memória histórica nipônica. Tal estratégia impediu que a declaração de 2015 de Shinzō Abe fosse considerada um genuíno ato discursivo de expiação política.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Atos discursivos de expiação política; Contrição; Estratégias de reelaboração do passado; Análise Crítica do Discurso; Memória*

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Introduction

This paper aims to study how strategies of re-elaboration of the past employed in atonement discourses may contribute to assess the authenticity of speech acts of political atonement. There is a discussion in literature concerning how to analyze the authenticity of speech acts of political atonement (Shepard, 2009; Smith, 2013; Koesten; Rowland, 2004; Ten Bos, 2011). This paper contributes to that discussion by proposing strategies of re-elaboration of the past (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, pp.1159-1187) as suitable paths to assess the authenticity of speech acts of political atonement. The paper addresses the statement uttered, on August 14, 2015, at a Press Conference, by former Japan's Prime Minister Shinzō Abe on the occasion of the anniversary of the end of World War II. The research puzzle does not question why Shinzō Abe employed a speech act of atonement. Given Japan's responsibilities in World War II, the use of a rhetoric of atonement is unsurprising. The paper aims to discuss how such speech act of atonement was discursively structured. Shinzō Abe's speech act of political atonement will be addressed by employing discursive legitimation strategies (Van Leeuwen, 2008) as a critical approach to language.

The paper argues that former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's 2015 speech act of political atonement endorsed the adoption, by Japanese society, of a strategy of cancellation of Japanese historical memory. The paper also claims that advocating such a strategy prevented Abe's 2015 speech act of political atonement from being considered a genuine act of atonement.

The paper comprises seven sections. The first section will present the research question. The second section will be dedicated to literature review. The third section will be devoted to methodological questions. The fourth section will address the paper's theoretical framework. The fifth section will analyze former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's speech act of political atonement. The sixth section will discuss, building from such analysis, the selected speech act of political atonement from the perspective of a typology of strategies of re-elaboration of the past (Caramani; Manucci, 2019). Debating distinct strategies of re-elaboration of the past will permit the assessment of the authenticity of the chosen speech act of political atonement. The concluding section will discuss the

significance of analyzing the authenticity of speech acts of political atonement and how one can develop such analysis in the future.

1 Research Question

The paper addresses the following research puzzle: how do strategies of re-elaboration of the past influence the authenticity of speech acts of political atonement? To address such a research puzzle, the meaning of political apology and political atonement has to be clarified. A “political apology” may be depicted as “an official apology given by a representative of a state, corporation or another organized group to victims, or descendants of victims, for injustices committed by the group’s officials or members” (Thompson, 2008, p.31). Edwards (2005, p.321) argues that “community focused apologies” comprise four elements: remembrance, reconciliation, mortification, and atonement.

Atonement embodies a gesture acknowledging responsibility for past wrongdoings to construct a new collective or individual “persona” with a reformed and converted subjectivity free of guilt (Edwards, 2005, p.322). Atonement is defined by Edwards (2005, p.323) as a first move in the direction of inter-community healing dynamics since it signifies the discursive compromise, assumed by the culprit or someone who speaks on the culprit’s behalf, that those past ordeals will not occur again.

Some authors study authenticity regarding rhetorical events of political atonement (Koesten; Rowland, 2004; Shepard, 2009). Koesten and Rowland (2004, pp.73-74) address authenticity through mortification. The authors (Koesten; Rowland, 2004, pp.73-74) argue that mortification is the “rhetoric form” that permits to articulate three concepts that allocate authenticity to “true atonement,” namely the recognition of “one’s sin” (“repentance”), “inward-looking” associated with the “promise to desist from sin” (“prayer”), and “reparation” (“charity”). Although, the authenticity criteria discussed by existing literature are not sufficient to fully identify the discursive elements that assign authenticity to a speech act of political atonement.

This paper contributes to the debate on the authenticity of speech acts of political atonement by proposing strategies of re-elaboration of the past (Caramani; Manucci, 2019) as valuable paths to assess such authenticity.

2 Literature Review

Speech acts of political atonement are forms of political communication. The study of the discursive performance of political selves is extensively developed by political communication literature and speech act theoretical research (Goffman, 1979; Jamieson; Kenski, 2017; Perloff, 2008; Austin, 1975; Searle, 1999).

The lack of dialogue between political communication studies and discourse analysis partially explains why apologia and atonement studies have been developed mainly within the realm of political speech acts and pragmatics theoretical research (Searle, 1999; Austin, 1975; Van Dijk, 2007). Ware and Linkugel (1973) were pioneers in introducing apologia as a rhetorical genre. It is possible to identify two distinct types of studies on apologia. The first type of literature tries to identify image restoration strategies where denial, challenging accusations, evasion, and justification are predominant (Benoit, 2015; Hearit, 2001). The second group of studies addresses apologia, highlighting the need to accept responsibility in contexts where guilt cannot be denied (Koesten; Rowland, 2004; Glynn, 1995).

Regarding atonement, relevant literature highlights the relevance of authenticity concerning speech acts of atonement. Shepard (2009) and Smith (2013) assess authenticity through several criteria, namely “blame acceptance,” the identification of “each harm,” the “recognition of the victim as a moral interlocutor,” and the expression of genuine regret. Koesten and Rowland (2004) establish an articulation between authenticity and mortification. Ten Bos (2011) evaluates authenticity through three elements: the physicality associated with the rhetoric of atonement, self-transformation, and the openness embodied in a speech act of atonement. Shepard (2009, p.462) introduced the critical concept of “simulated atonement,” which occurs when “wrongdoers appear to come clean in admitting their guilt, while simultaneously explaining the situation in a way that reduces their responsibility.”

The imprecise nature of both categories of apologia and atonement (Smith, 2009; Ten Bos, 2011) is related to the underdevelopment of the analysis of authenticity in political atonement studies compared to the abundance of studies that address apologia and atonement from the perspective of corporate management (Huxman; Bruce, 1995; Hearit, 2001) and corporate public relations (Coombs; Holladay, 2001). As a result, the articulation between discursive strategies and speech acts of political atonement is particularly underdeveloped. Most literature on political atonement “treats the subject” as pursuing the same goals as private or corporate atonement acts (Ellwanger, 2009). The existence of a distinction between corporate and political speech acts of atonement highlights the need to study, namely through case studies, what discursive elements should be employed to evaluate the authenticity of speech acts of political atonement and how those elements are related with more comprehensive strategies of re-elaboration of the past (Caramani; Manucci, 2019).

3 Methodological Framework: Discursive Legitimation Strategies

The paper has adopted discursive legitimation strategies as a methodological instrument to analyze the selected speech act of political atonement (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp.91-112). Discursive legitimation strategies, studied within the remit of critical discourse analysis, “refer to the process by which speakers accredit or license a type of social behavior” (Reyes, 2011, p.782). Legitimation is, therefore, understood as the “justification of a behavior” and is performed through argumentation (Reyes, 2011, p.782). Such argumentation is intended to clarify and explain actions, ideas or thoughts. Finally, discursive legitimation strategies are employed to ensure approval from a particular audience (Reyes, 2011, p.782). Political atonement is understood as a discursive pledge regarding the absence of occurrence of past behavior (Edwards, 2005). As a discursive pledge, speech acts of political atonement can be defined as a genre of rhetorical argumentation developed before an audience, justifying and elucidating a type of political behavior (Edwards, 2005). An articulation can, therefore, be established between discourse analysis, speech acts of political atonement, and strategies of discursive legitimation.

To discuss the complex dimensions embraced in a discursive process of legitimation, van Leeuwen (2007) developed a model comprised of four legitimation categories: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis.

Legitimation through authorization employs references to the authority vested in tradition, custom, and law, as well as in individuals to whom authority has been bestowed (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Legitimation through authorization may occur through the invocation of personal authority, expert authority, role model authority, the authority of tradition, impersonal authority, or the authority of conformity (Van Leeuwen, 2007). A second discursive strategy of legitimation is moral evaluation. Legitimation through moral evaluation is defined as “legitimation by reference to value systems.” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.92) It may be employed in association with the use of evaluative adjectives, abstraction, and analogies (positive and negative) (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.92). Legitimation through rationalization is developed through references to the objectives and habits of “institutionalized social action,” as well as to the knowledge constructed by society to allocate institutional goals with “cognitive validity” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.92). Legitimation through rationalization may be developed through instrumental and theoretical rationalization (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.92). The final discursive strategy of legitimation is mythopoesis, understood as “legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.92). The narratives that sustain a strategy of legitimation may have a moral framework (moral tales) or a cautionary nature (cautionary tales) (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.92).

4 Theoretical Framework: The Past and its Narratives

The relationship between speech acts of political atonement and narratives of re-elaboration of the past is shaped by the importance of memory and trauma politics (Caramani; Manucci, 2019). The politics of memory and trauma emerges fundamentally from the contestation around the meaning of historical memory (Edkins, 2003, p.58). Contention around the significance of historical memory and its translation into collective

memory can take place over long periods without a community consensus on the meaning of traumatic events and mnemonic practices (Becker, 2014).

What Caramani and Manucci designate as the “burden of the past” is a fundamental element in comprehending the evolution of political regimes in several states around the globe (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, p.1159). Literature has developed the link between the emergence of populist and right-wing parties and the historical legacy of nationalist and fascist pasts (Mudde; Kaltwasser, 2013; Caramani; Manucci, 2019). Despite the controversies surrounding the definition of populism and neo-fascism, it is increasingly relevant to analyze how the past influences contemporary political discourse (Traverso, 2019). In this context, present narratives about the past constitute a significant subject of analysis. As Traverso writes, “History is always written in and from the present: our interpretations of the past are obviously related to the culture, the intellectual sensibility, the ethical and political worries of our time” (Traverso, 2019, p.132).

To discuss how mnemonic narratives of the past cause or hinder the emergence of right-wing parties, Caramani and Manucci (2019) developed a typology of ideal strategies of re-elaboration of the past, namely heroization, culpabilization, victimization, and cancellation. Concerning this paper, the strategies of culpabilization and cancellation assume particular significance. Culpabilization occurs when a state accepts its responsibility as the wrongdoer, carrying the “burden of guilt for the fascist regime and its perpetrators” (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, p.1164). Official mnemonical narratives delegitimize the country’s fascist past, highlight the need to develop a politics of reparation, and stigmatize distinct narratives (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, p.1164). Cancellation is a discursive strategy of re-elaboration of the past characterized by responsibility avoidance since a nation’s historical fascist past is erased from public discussion (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, p.1164). By constructing a memory of cancellation, a state does not question its involvement with the historical and past development of a fascist regime (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, p.1164). Consequently, such a development is not problematized, resulting in the co-existence of diverse narratives about the past, and in the inexistence of a strong official narrative able to have a hegemonic role in a non-existent debate (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, p.1165). However, the characterizing element of such a strategy is “not the divided nature of collective memory but the absence of it” (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, p.1165). The typology

developed by Caramani and Manucci (2019) classifies national strategies of re-elaboration of the past. However, this paper assumes that it is possible to identify those strategies in individual decision-makers' narratives since it is through their political rhetoric that national strategies of re-elaboration of the past are enacted.

5 Findings

The fifth section of the paper will study the selected speech act of political atonement, namely former Japan's Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's speech at a Press Conference on the occasion of the anniversary of the end of World War II (Abe, 2015). Former Japan's Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's 2015 speech can be considered a speech act of political atonement and is directly related to the mnemonical context of World War II. The paper used qualitative content analysis of diverse textual and discursive elements (Mayring, 2014). Findings are organized through van Leeuwen's (2007) four discursive strategies and associated sub-categories of legitimation.

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's statement was made at a Press Conference on August 14, 2015. Former Prime Minister (FPM) Abe spoke in Japanese. The translation was provided by the Cabinet of the Prime Minister of Japan.

Regarding the discursive legitimation strategy of authorization (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.92), the rhetorical analysis of former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's speech demonstrates Abe's perspective on the meaning of history and the relationship between history and politics. The former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe declared, in his speech, that before his statement, he "assembled the Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and the World Order in the 21st Century" urging its members to "discuss the matter most thoroughly as well as straightforwardly" (Abe, 2015, para.6). Former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, therefore, invoked expert authority to legitimate his statement. Shinzō Abe recognized that "the views and opinions over history differ from one member to another among those experts" (Abe, 2015, para.7). However, and since the members of the Advisory Panel reached a certain degree of consensus, their Report would henceforth be considered by Abe as the "voice of history" (Abe, 2015, para.7). Shinzō Abe also argued that the Report, developed by the Advisory Panel, allowed him

to “draw lessons from history and lay out the path we should pursue from now onward” (Abe, 2015, para.8). History became, in FPM Abe’s narrative, a source of expertise (Abe, 2015, para.8). The authority of conformity was employed by Shinzō Abe to align his statement with his predecessors’ former speech acts of apology for Japan’s actions during World War II. In Abe’s words, “Such position [of apology] articulated by the previous cabinets will remain unshakable into the future” (Abe, 2015, para.23). This declaration was meant to imply that Abe’s speech act of atonement builds on previous Japanese Prime Ministers’ similar statements.

Concerning the discursive legitimation strategy of moral evaluation (Van Leeuwen, 2007), FPM Abe employs moral judgments to recognize the suffering experienced by Japan’s opponents during World War II, namely China, Southeast Asian countries, and Pacific islands (Abe, 2015, para.16). In a “soft” reference to the question of “comfort women,” FPM Shinzō Abe stated that “We must never forget that there were women behind the battlefields whose honor and dignity were severely injured.” (Abe, 2015, para.16) Abe uttered a poignant act of collective contrition, declaring,

Upon the innocent people did our country inflict immeasurable damage and suffering. History is harsh. What is done cannot be undone. Each and every one of them had his or her life, dream, and beloved family. When I squarely contemplate this obvious fact, even now, I find myself speechless and my heart is rent with the utmost grief (Abe, 2015, para.17).

The analysis of former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe’s statement did not reveal the use of rationalization as a discursive legitimation strategy. The discursive strategy of legitimation more frequently employed by FPM was the strategy of mythopoesis. In his speech, Abe employed moral and cautionary tales (Van Leeuwen, 2007). The moral tales used by FPM Shinzō Abe focused on three main themes:

- i. the expression of remorse for actions developed by Japan against other nations;
- ii. the underpinning of the resilience of the Japanese nation;
- iii. the acclamation of the Japanese nation.

It is through a moral tale that FPM Shinzō Abe expressed remorse for actions developed by Japan against other Asian nations. In his speech, FPM Abe stated that

“Japan has repeatedly expressed the feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology for its actions during the war” (Abe, 2015, para.22). Shinzō Abe voiced its “heartfelt gratitude” to the international community for reintegrating Japan after World War II (Abe, 2015, para.29). The former Prime Minister praised, in particular the “former POWs (prisoners of war) of the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Australia and other nations” who “have visited Japan for many years to continue praying for the souls of the war dead on both sides” (Abe, 2015, para.26), as well as the Chinese people represented by Abe as “tolerant” despite the “unbearable sufferings caused by the Japanese military,” namely to Chinese POWs (Abe, 2015, para.27).

The second moral tale was focused on highlighting the resilience of the Japanese people. Shinzō Abe, in his speech, uttered condolences to all the victims of World War II: “On the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, I bow my head deeply before the souls of all those who perished both at home and abroad. I express my feelings of profound grief and my eternal, sincere condolences” (Abe, 2015, para.14). However, the FPM particularly stressed the suffering of the Japanese people during the war employing a language of resilience. In Abe’s words,

More than three million of our compatriots lost their lives during the war: on the battlefields worrying about the future of their homeland and wishing for the happiness of their families; in remote foreign countries after the war, in extreme cold or heat, suffering from starvation and disease. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the air raids on Tokyo and other cities, and the ground battles in Okinawa, among others, took a heavy toll among ordinary citizens without mercy (Abe, 2015, para.15).

FPM Shinzō Abe stressed the fact that Japan is “the only country to have ever suffered the devastation of atomic bombings during war” (Abe, 2015, para.33), highlighted the “sacrifices” made by the Japanese people during World War II (Abe, 2015, para.18), and underpinned how, after the war, Japanese “were able to survive in a devastated land in sheer poverty” (Abe, 2015, para.31).

This narrative of resilience is associated with a moral tale of acclamation of the Japanese nation, for having created “a free and democratic country, abided by the rule of law, and consistently upheld that pledge never to wage a war again” (Abe, 2015, para.21). Shinzō Abe also praised the Japanese nation for “while taking silent pride in the path we

have walked as a peace-loving nation for as long as seventy years, we remain determined never to deviate from this steadfast course” (Abe, 2015, para.21). The acclamation of the Japanese nation is achieved by:

- i. representing Japan as a peaceful country that has, since the war, contributed to the “peace and prosperity” of its neighboring countries (Abe, 2015, para.22);
- ii. stressing the fact that “more than six million Japanese repatriates managed to come home safely after the war from various parts of the Asia-Pacific and became the driving force behind Japan’s postwar reconstruction” (Abe, 2015, para.26);
- iii. highlighting “that nearly three thousand Japanese children left behind in China were able to grow up there and set foot on the soil of their homeland again” (Abe, 2015, para.26);
- iv. representing Japan as a protector of women’s rights, in an implicit reference to the question concerning “comfort women” abused by Japanese soldiers during the war (Abe, 2015, para.34);
- v. depicting Japan as a defender of “a free, fair and open international economic system” while blaming economic protectionism and “economic blocs” for “made the seeds of conflict thrive” in a clear allusion to the origins of World War II (Abe, 2015, para.35);
- vi. representing Japan as a “guardian of peace, freedom, democracy, and human rights” and as an active promoter of a “Proactive Contribution to Peace” (Abe, 2015, para.36);
- vii. portraying Japan as a country able to protect its independence against colonial rule, inspiring, through its resistance to colonialism, “encouragement to many people under colonial rule from Asia to Africa” (Abe, 2015, para.9);
- viii. highlighting the fact that Japan was the first country in Asia to build a “constitutional government” (Abe, 2015, para.9).

The moral tale of acclamation of the Japanese nation corresponds to Abe’s attempt to re-elaborate the Japanese past, and to his need to construct a new Japanese international persona in agreement with the goal of atonement speeches.

Cautionary tales employed by FPM Shinzō Abe developed four significant areas:

- i. the politicization of history;
- ii. the causes of World War II and blame allocation;
- iii. the rehabilitation of the Japanese international persona;
- iv. the complexity of Japanese memory politics.

The relationship between politics and history is a central theme in Shinzō Abe's speech. The former Japanese Prime Minister argued about the need of the Japanese people to pause and think about the past "no matter how distant it has become" (Abe, 2015, para.1). History is represented in Abe's moral judgment as a source of "painful memories" which "will never be healed" (Abe, 2015, para.24), but also as a source of teachings for the future since, in Abe's words, "Politics must learn from history wisdom for the future" (Abe, 2015, para.2). Abe legitimized the constitution of the "Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and the World Order in the 21st Century" with the need to "reflect upon the road to war, the path we have taken since it ended, and the era of the twentieth century," as well with the need, based on "lessons drawn," to "contemplate, and then lay out, the path Japan ought to take toward the future, and in the world" (Abe, 2015, para.3). Shinzō Abe's particular vision about the origins of World War II departed from a contradictory perspective regarding history and politics. FPM Abe refused historical revisionism, arguing that his "strong belief" is that "Political intentions, or diplomatic ones, should never be allowed to distort history" (Abe, 2015, para.5). However, several passages of his statement contradict such a belief on the significance of historical facts.

Firstly, Abe warned that "we must remain humble toward history" and that such humbleness requires "that we always continue to look into history in order for us to ponder whether there are other voices we have heretofore failed to listen to" (Abe, 2015, para.40). Abe seemed to argue that the history of World War II is not closed and that there is room for the emergence of alternative visions about Japan's participation in World War II, that the FPM designated as "other voices" (Abe, 2015, para.51), that should be listened to so that the Japanese can "learn wisdom for our future" (Abe, 2015, para.41).

Secondly, and despite Abe's recognition that Japan "took the wrong course" when decided to advance "along the road to war" (Abe, 2015, para.12), FPM Shinzō Abe questioned whether Japanese actions during World II constitute or do not constitute an act of aggression (Abe, 2015, para.47). The reopening of such a controversial debate is

visible in Abe's following words: "as for what kinds of actions in concrete terms qualify or fail to qualify as 'aggression,' I believe we should leave that for historians to discuss" (Abe, 2015, para.47).

Finally, Shinzō Abe developed a particular vision about the origins of World War II, allocating blame for the onset of the war to specific historical phenomena. Abe argued that it was the constitution of pre-war "economic blocs" which "made the seeds of conflict thrive" (Abe, 2015, para.35). Shinzō Abe also claimed that several factors explain Japan's decision to go to war, namely, the Great Depression and its consequences on the Japanese economy, a "sense of crisis" due to colonial rule, the formation of Western colonial empires and economic blocs, and a growing "sense of isolation" (Abe, 2015, para.10). Due to these historical factors, Abe claimed that Japan was compelled to "overcome its diplomatic and economic deadlock through the use of force" (Abe, 2015, para.10).

The discussion about the causes of World War II, and consequent blame allocation, are developed in association with Shinzō Abe's attempt to (re)build the Japanese international persona, particularly by condemning war (Abe, 2015, para.19). FPM Abe stated, "Incident, aggression, war – we shall never again resort to any form of the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. We shall abandon colonial rule forever and respect the right of self-determination of all peoples throughout the world" (Abe, 2015, para.20).

The rehabilitation of the Japanese international persona is hampered by the complexity of Japanese memory and trauma politics which is visible in FPM Shinzō Abe's statement. Two elements in Shinzō Abe's statement demonstrate how the trauma and memory of World War II are still very problematic issues in Japanese politics.

Firstly, and despite acknowledging that "Japanese, across generations, must squarely face the history of the past" (Abe, 2015, para.20), FPM Shinzō Abe cautioned that,

We must not allow a situation in which our children, grandchildren, and even children of the future in generations to come, who have nothing to do with that war, must continue to apologize, or let them be predestined to apologize (Abe, 2015, para.30).

In Abe's perspective, Japan's responsibility for World War II events terminates with the "generation that is alive at this moment" (Abe, 2015, para.61).

The second element regards Japanese national security policy and the 2015 approval of the "Japanese Legislation for Peace and Security," which entailed a transformation of Japan's "post-war national security policy," since it defined the situations where Japan may internationally resort to the use of force" (Valero, 2017, para.4). The Legislation was considered an attempt by Shinzō Abe's cabinet to address Japan's "wartime past and security future" (Valero, 2017, para.4). FPM Shinzō Abe, in his 2015 statement, claimed that the new Legislation demonstrates that Japan should "not fail to prepare for contingencies" (Abe, 2015, para.61). The Legislation was, therefore, characterized by FPM Abe as aiming "to secure the lives and peaceful daily lives of the Japanese people" and to "enhance our ability to prevent in advance conflicts from happening" (Abe, 2015, para.10).

6 Discussion

Shinzō Abe's speech act of atonement mirrors the complexity of the Japanese approaches to the past (Hook, 2015, pp.295-298). Between 1984 and 2019, Japan voiced 23 international speech acts of apology (Dodds, 2020). The authenticity of those acts is often contested. As Desmond argues, "In a society where several rounds of apologies will be made in the most trivial circumstances, the question of how to admit responsibility for the enormities Japan committed during the war has been a vexing one" (Desmond, 1995, p.3).

Shinzō Abe's mandates as Prime Minister contributed to heightening the domestic and international controversy regarding Japanese memory politics, namely due to his visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, his opposition to UNESCO's decision to inscribe the "Documents of the Nanjing Massacre" in the Memory of the World record, or his appointing of "unapologetic revisionists to high-profile posts, including at the national public broadcaster, NHK" (Soble, 2015, para.9; Pletnia, 2020, pp.1-16; Nakano, 2021, pp.590-607). Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's 2015 speech act of political atonement endorsed the adoption, by Japanese society, of a strategy of cancellation

(Caramani; Manucci, 2019). The endorsement of such a strategy may explain why Abe's 2015 statement was considered insincere by both domestic and foreign audiences (Soble, 2015). Chinese officials considered the statement unauthentic and rich in "linguistic tricks" (Soble, 2015, para.10). The South Korean President, Park-Geun-hye, labelled the statement as insufficient (Soble, 2015, para.11). Former Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, whose 1995 statement is considered as the most authentic speech act of atonement ever made by a Japanese leader, argued that Abe's 2015 speech was flawed since Shinzō Abe used "flowery words and talked at length, but he didn't make clear why he was doing it" (Soble, 2015, para.12; Desmond, 1995).

Following Caramani and Manuci (2019, p.1164), a strategy of re-elaboration of the past based on cancellation is founded on the "avoidance of responsibility" for a fascist past. Cancellation is grounded in an attempt to erase collective memory. As Caramani and Manuci (2019, p.1165) state, "by developing a memory of cancellation, a country removes its past relationship with fascism from the public debate." The country does not discuss its "implicit or explicit complicity with, and accommodation of, external regimes," weakening the development of an official narrative about the state's fascist past (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, p.1165). Such weakness creates a window of opportunity for the emergence of various narratives about the past, which prevents the stigmatization of the country's fascist period and fosters the fading of collective memory about such a period (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, p.1165).

The current Japanese strategy of re-elaboration of the past is culpabilization. However, this paper argues that Shinzō Abe's 2015 speech act of political atonement endorsed an approach of cancellation. Several elements corroborate such an argument.

The first element respects the acknowledgment of responsibility. The way FPM Shinzō Abe, in his statement, recognized guilt for the atrocities committed during World War II is controversial. In his 2015 statement, Shinzō Abe employed authority by conformity (Van Leeuwen, 2007) to argue that post-war Japanese cabinets have expressed Japan's remorse and apology for World War II events. Abe also recognized the suffering experienced by Japan's enemies during World War II, as well as the harm inflicted by Japan "upon innocent people," causing "immeasurable damage and suffering" (Abe, 2015, para.17). However, Shinzō Abe attempted to weaken Japanese responsibility for World War II events shifting such burden to external forces, chiefly to western colonial

powers, colonialism, and pre-war “economic blocs” (ABE, 2015, para.9) considered responsible for making “the seeds of conflicts thrive,” (Abe, 2015, para.19) for engendering the economic dynamics that led to World War II, and, mainly, for driving Japan to a “deadlock” that forced the country to go to war (ABE, 2015, para.33). The strategy pursued by Abe evokes Shepard’s (2009, p.462) concept of “simulated atonement.” In his 2015 speech, Shinzo Abe admits Japan’s wrongdoings in World War II but frames the situation by trying to diminish the country’s responsibilities (see Shepard, 2009, p.462). According to Shepard’s (2009, p.462) concept of “simulated atonement,” Shinzo Abe’s strategy was not successful since the domestic and international “salience” of Japanese “sins” committed during World War II is still very significant.

A second important element is the attempt to erase collective memory about Japan’s wartime past. Shinzō Abe’s speech act of political atonement is frequently compared to atonement events uttered by his predecessors, namely, Tomiishi Murayama’s 1995 declaration (Soble, 2015). Murayama was the first Japanese Prime Minister to have explicitly acknowledged that Japan had committed acts of aggression during World War II and unequivocally condemned the Japanese past of “self-righteous nationalism” (Desmond, 1995, p.4). Strategic elements of Murayama’s 1995 declaration, namely the reference to Japanese acts of aggression, were inserted into Shinzō Abe’s speech (Abe, 2015; Murayama, 1995). However, there are significant distinctions. Through the authority of conformity, Abe endorsed his predecessors’ apologies. However, in a “potentially contentious break with the previous expression of contrition by Japanese leaders,” Abe did not utter his personal apology (Soble, 2015, para.3). The fact that Shinzō Abe did not utter his personal apology is significant (Soble, 2015). It is congruent with his argument that future Japanese generations should not “be predestined to apologize” for World War II events (Abe, 2015, para.53). In Abe’s perspective, Japan’s responsibility for World War II events should terminate with the “generation that is alive at this moment” (Abe, 2015, para.53). Shinzō Abe seemed to believe that discussing Japanese acts of aggression during World War II could endanger the “ontological” and “mnemonical security” of forthcoming Japanese generations and, therefore, that in the future, Japan should pursue a strategy of re-elaboration of the past based on cancellation (Nakano, 2021; Gustafsson, 2014, pp.71-86; Caramani; Manucci, 2019). Adopting a

strategy of cancellation regarding the Japanese role in World War II facilitates legitimizing the reform of Japanese security policy translated into the 2015 Legislation for Peace and Security promoted by Shinzō Abe's government (Hosoya, 2015, pp.44-52).

A third element concerns the development of a narrative about Japan's wartime past able to stigmatize the country's nationalist period. As previously mentioned, the reading of Shinzō Abe's 2015 statement reveals that the former Japanese Prime Minister had a very particular perspective regarding the relationship between history and politics. Abe refused revisionism, which may explain his decision to constitute an "Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and the World Order in the 21st Century." Invoking expert authority (Van Leeuwen, 2007), Shinzō Abe classified the conclusions of the Panel as the "voice of history." (Abe, 2015, para.7) However, and somehow contradicting his condemnation of political revisionism, Shinzō Abe employed a cautionary tale (Van Leeuwen, 2007), to warn that Japanese should always be open to hear "other voices we have heretofore failed to listen to" (Abe, 2015, para.40). Such a statement, instead of stigmatizing Japan's nationalist past, legitimizes the emergence of alternative voices that may glorify such a past. Abe's message was intended for international and domestic audiences but favored the latter. Privileging domestic audiences and adopting a soft approach regarding Japan's war crimes were strategies employed by Shinzō Abe to satisfy Japan's conservative right-wing elites and social sectors, which oppose the development of a "masochistic view of national history" (Szczepanska, 2014, p.1). In his statement, Shinzō Abe never adopted an explicit attitude of condemnation regarding Japan's nationalist past and did not mention the collaboration between Germany and Japan during World War II. The FPM only recognized that Japan became a challenger to the international order after World War I and that the country took a "wrong course" in World War II (Abe, 2015, para.12). However, there was never a clear condemnation of the regime that led Japan into war and an Alliance with Nazi Germany. Shinzō Abe preferred to acclaim the achievement of pre-war and post-war Japan investing rhetorically in reconstructing Japan's international subjectivity.

Conclusion

This paper claimed that former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's 2015 speech act of political atonement endorsed the adoption, by Japanese society, of a strategy of re-elaboration of the past based on cancellation (Caramani; Manucci, 2019). Shinzō Abe's 2015 statement can be considered an attempt to fulfill five main goals:

- i. to weaken Japanese responsibility for World War II events;
- ii. to legitimate the belief that, in the future, Japanese public debate should erase questions regarding Japan's responsibility for acts of aggression committed during World War II;
- iii. to weaken the traditional Japanese strategy of culpabilization translated in the absence, in Abe's 2015 statement, of a clear condemnation of the regime that led Japan into war and an alliance with Nazi Germany;
- iv. to praise Japan's pre-war and post-war achievements, thereby blurring the memory of the countries' war atrocities;
- v. to validate the emergence of various narratives about the past, preventing the stigmatization of the country's nationalist period and fostering the fading of collective memory (Caramani; Manucci, 2019, p.1165).

These five goals are congruent with a strategy of re-elaboration of the past based on cancellation (Caramani; Manucci, 2019). This paper argued that endorsing such a strategy prevented former Japanese Prime Minister Abe's 2015 speech act of political atonement from being considered a genuine act of atonement. Shinzō Abe's 2015 speech act of political atonement favored domestic audiences in an attempt to please right-wing conservative Japanese elites opposing the normalization of a narrative based on a "masochistic view of national history" (Szczepanska, 2014, p.1). In his 2015's statement, Shinzō Abe did not utter his own apology for Japanese war crimes (Abe, 2015). He did not invoke personal authority but expert authority to legitimate Japan's collective recognition of guilt. Hence, Abe's presence in the statement was minimal, which allowed the Japanese Former Prime Minister to dissociate himself from Japan's acknowledgment of responsibility for the atrocities of World War II. Such a dissociation hampered the recognition of his speech act of political atonement as authentic. This is relevant since, following Caramani and Mannuci (2019), adopting a strategy of re-elaborating the past

based on cancellation may have consequences for countries' domestic politics, namely regarding the emergence of extreme right-wing political movements whose agenda may include historical revisionism.

The significance of the argument developed in the paper is related to the need to clarify, for both political rhetors and academics, the conditions that assign authenticity to speech acts of political atonement. The recognition of speech acts of political atonement as authentic contributes to the surpassing and healing of mnemonic traumas and the subsequent reconciliation and pacification of inter-state relations. Further studies should analyze specific and diverse speech acts of political atonement to assess the elements that allocate or remove authenticity to those acts.

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Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [*Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies*] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review 1

The paper makes a pertinent discussion on the speech act of political atonement by drawing on an extensive review of the subject and by proposing new categories for approaching the phenomenon. The literature review is up-to-date and is pertinent to the analysis. The methodological procedures are plainly exposed and are adequate for the study. Moreover, the analysis itself is well argued, with important findings regarding the issue under discussion. Therefore, I have no restrictions regarding the publication of the paper. APPROVED.

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Review II

The paper is very well written and structured. It analyses a historical event of major importance and is, therefore, very relevant to studies in the field. The literature review draws from both the general classical texts and specific works in atonement. Unfortunately, the analysis was based on a Japanese-English translation. Even if it is the official translation provided by the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, is an important limitation of the study, particularly in the case of distant cultural and linguistic pairs, such as Japanese and English. That limitation raises the question of whether the findings fully reflect Japanese discursive and political discourse traditions. In other words, are the findings accurate; would Abe, the Japanese public, or a Japanese analyst recognize and validate them as well? I would be more reassured if the paper was co-authored by a Japan expert and considered Japanese political culture in the analysis. The literature, for example, is almost entirely non-Japanese. Still, the speech addresses a world audience, albeit mainly Asian, and the findings seem plausible and interesting. The discussion also considers some context and reception of the speech. The paper does not provide methodological innovations, but it clearly and competently applies the theoretical framework. It is an interesting and relevant contribution to the field. APPROVED.

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