

FROM FALSE HARMONY TO FRANK SPEECH: VERBAL AGGRESSIONS IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

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- **ABSTRACT:** Relying on the theoretical framework of Discourse Analysis, under a Foucauldian perspective, this paper aims at investigating the mechanics and the possible intensification of verbal aggression in the last two Brazilian presidential electoral campaigns, in 2014 and 2018, which were considered utterly violent in the perception of the Brazilian people. In order to do so, we have relied on the concept of discursive event, which is closely related to the conditions of emergence of discourses once the statements are produced within a system of enunciability. These statements are inescapably inscribed within historical and social frameworks of its constitution, analyzed thereof, considering their formulation and circulation forms. The results indicate that, according to the analyzed excerpts - extracted from the broadcast debates of the 2014 and 2018 electoral campaigns -, the discursive construction of a false harmony tends to express a balance in polemic relations that are particular to the political discourse, especially in scenarios of electoral campaigns. The frank speech, in turn, under the mask of authenticity, - and, by extension, of the true-self - acts as a strategy of a political discourse, obliterating the possibility of a political game based on argumentative trades, which reveals its authoritarianism.
- **KEYWORDS:** political discourse; electoral Campaign; aggressiveness; verbal aggression; frank speech.

Introduction

Democratic societies, by superseding the court society, encourage new forms of behaviors and treatments. Whereas aristocracy demanded moderation, posture, and deference in the gestures and ways of being (HAROCHE, 2008), the contemporary society differs from it, in its own ways, by the rising fading and disappearance of formality expressions, ceremonial rituals, and the appreciation forms that sustained the hierarchical distinctions in several domains, such as the social, juridical, and political ones.

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The end of the court society, however, seems not to have yet abolished conspiring, flattering or backstabbing attitudes, which prevail in social relations expressed by verbal and gestural agreements, capable of exposing affection, flattery, obsequiousness, as well as insolence, arrogance, and rudeness.

The reduction of hierarchical relations in democracies has not undermined the use of false deference, of falsehood, and manipulated lies for self-benefit. Deference requires time, which is highly scarce in the current society, characterized by subjects that present themselves as hurried, unwarily, and self-sufficient. In the Old Regime, such attention was applied solely towards members of the Court, and therefore the majority of people had no kind of appreciation nor attention, while in a democracy it is expected such attention to be equally applied to all, which does not actually happen. Not rarely, the gesture of deference and acknowledgement that should be dedicated to others is now dedicated to people themselves, once they live in a society that demands and values a visibility apparatus (FOUCAULT, 2014, HAROCHE, 2008) that highlights itself in the competition for political hierarchies. This is what is repeatedly seen in electoral campaigns, in which the candidate-subject focuses on saying good things about themselves, thus providing space to the smearing of their opponents.

We acknowledge that there are strategies used in the formulation of the electoral political discourses particular to contemporaneity (SARGENTINI, 2017a), such as the (i) segmentation, in which the elector is interpellated by profile - profession, gender, religious beliefs; the (ii) sweetening, when the candidate offers to the elector a posture that reflects amiability, appreciation and respect towards diversity, and (iii) aestheticization, which values the political staging, above all in television broadcast (SARGENTINI, 2017b). Which strategies used in the two last electoral campaigns in Brazil, in the years of 2014 and 2018, are to be considered violent?¹ Has the sweetening strategy been replaced by aggressiveness? Have the candidates of the 2014 campaign relied on strategies to distance themselves from aggression forms and to come closer to false harmonies that would be compatible with efficiency, balance, and self-governance (FOUCAULT, 2010)? Has the 2018 campaign taken a different turn, once the figure of one of the candidates seemed to distance themselves from the concern of maintaining conducts that cast an image of self-governance, engaging more on the disqualifying exposure of others, doing so in a straight-forward, insulting manner, through a supposedly frank speech? At last, once in 2014 the campaign was considered utterly violent and in 2018 this characteristic has intensified. Does the supposed frank speech represent and entitle a certain abandonment of the foundations of democratic societies?

Relying on the theoretical frameworks of Discourse Analysis, this article intends to draw from the notion of discursive events, which is closely related to conditions

¹ Available at: <https://politica.estadao.com.br/noticias/eleicoes,dilma-e-aecio-votam-e-trocaram-criticas-sobre-agressoes-na-campanha,1583067>. Access on: 23 Feb. 2022.

of emergence, once they are produced after a system of enunciability. According to Foucault (1972), all statements should be understood as an event, once they present not only a singularity, but also a regularity. However, treating each statement as singular, that produces an event, does not hinder us - in a short-term study - from, for example, exposing a regularity that builds a network of singular statements, provoking a rupture, a discontinuity, in relation to previous discursive practices. In this paper we analyze the occurrence of minor events that have promoted these ruptures in ways of saying, whether by suspending or intensifying aggressiveness. We can, therefore, consider the statements as discursive, historic practices by which novelty is produced. Thereby, through the description and analysis of statements - of discursive practices - we can find these transformations, the novelty, the event; and by describing the event, we shall see the conditions of emergence “that determine the very materiality of the statement” (CASTRO, 2009, p. 25).

In order to do so, it is necessary, at first, to describe the statements so we can visualize a broader series of transformations. We shall stem from the linguistic description, the discursive materiality, to be able to establish the sequences and events, once the discursive practices are responsible for such transformation. Within this very transformation there are discontinuities, which means that even in a sequence marked by politeness, for instance, there are occurrences - although scarce - of irony, accusations, among other forms of aggressive wording. We shall observe the games of power and force, and the strategies applied to them; to achieve that, we shall analyze statements extracted from broadcast debates from October 14, 16 and 24, 2014; August 9 and 17, 2018; September 26 and 30, 2018; and October 4, 2018, taking them as the revealing statements of violence forms present in the campaign discourses, as well as the strategies and intensity degrees of them.

The mutations of expression forms in the political game

Aggressiveness can be categorized as physical, verbal, or symbolic. In this paper, we shall work with verbal and symbolic aggression, which are materialized into insult expressions, irony resources, the selection and organization of syntactic constructions, the applied lexis, the drawn arguments, theme selection, derogatory sayings, smearing, speech tone, allusions, gestures, resources that constitute imagistic materiality, among others. Scholars Bacot (2007) and Bravo (2015) characterize insults, for instance, as symbolic objects and, to define them, they rely on the understanding its Latin term, *insultare*, which means “jump over” to provoke the opponent’s downfall, or even their extinction, transforming them into things, and then, nothing.

Aggressiveness is befitting of political clashes; however, the aggression forms change, and it has been perceived that they have intensified over the last two Brazilian presidential electoral campaigns. In 2014, newspapers published that electors acknowledged the existence of overly aggressive attacks between candidates. The

website of the Folha de São Paulo newspaper, for instance, published, on October 22, 2014, an article called “71% criticize the aggressiveness of the elections”:

The data was retrieved from Datafolha’s research that was disclosed this Tuesday (October 21, 2018). Another 32% answered that both the rivals are being equally aggressive.

In total, 71% of the voters declared they do not agree with the belligerence recorded in the second round. To them, aggressiveness is not part of the dispute, whereas 27% affirm they believe that aggressiveness is, indeed, part of it.²

Political scientist Maria Teresa Kerbauy (MACÁRIO; FERRICHE, 2014), on an interview given to *Câmara* network, affirmed that not even the campaigns of 1989 have reached the violence levels of 2014, stating that “The dispute between Aécio and Dilma shall be part of History, and it will be recalled as one with loads of violence and deconstruction attacks”.

Political scientists Amaral & Ribeiro (2015, p.110) also confirm that the rising aggressiveness of the 2014 campaign, highlighting, for instance, the PSDB (Brazilian Social-Democratic Party) strategy: “Differently from what has been done in 2002, 2006, and 2010, the toucans³, who started to rely on the support of Marina Silva, adopted more aggressive campaign strategies [...]”.

Among the candidates, the aggressions are recorded as slurring expressions; for example, in 2014 the candidate Aécio called the candidate Dilma “frivolous” and accused the Workers Party (PT) of running “the most sordid campaign ever ran in the country”, accusing the political party of “electoral terrorism” to “prevail in office”⁴. The violence also materializes into approaching themes that express gender and racial intolerance exposed by “corrosive and prejudiced discourses against women, northeastern people, poor and rich people, among other ones” (SARGENTINI, 2017b, p. 109).

There has been conditions of emergence to those violent-considered statements in the 2014 and 2018 campaigns, whether by the domains associated to other statements (lots of xenophobic, racist, misogynistic statements started to spread out and, besides, new sensibilities to such statements granted them highlights), or by the place taken by whom is speaking, whether intending to adhere to the argument of the *politically correct* discourse, or to the argument of the frank speech, which finds no limits in phrasing. All of it indicates that the perception of what would be aggressive is filtered by a “will to truth” (FOUCAULT, 1996) of what is seen as aggressive in different moments, cultures,

² Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2014/10/1536236-71-criticam-agressividade-na-eleicao.shtml>. Access on: 23 Feb. 2022.

³ Due to the mascot of the party, toucans are used to refer to members of the PSDB.

⁴ Available at: <https://politica.estadao.com.br/noticias/eleicoes,dilma-e-aecio-votam-e-trocaram-criticas-sobre-agressoes-na-campanha,1583067>. Access on: 19 Jul. 2020.

and multiple speakers. According to Foucault, what is at stake in a true discursive game is desire and power; such a game is understood as a collection of procedures that, for instance, shall acknowledge the phrasing whether as aggression or frankness.

Some facts seem to ease aggressive attitudes. Jair Bolsonaro, in the 2018 campaign, was granted with a slight suspension of aggressive attacks on the days that followed his episode of physical violence, when he was stabbed - “The former captain could have been even more attacked – his opponents avoided addressing him with straightforward critiques on the days that followed the attack suffered by the candidate”⁵.

Aggressiveness in the 2018 campaign has not been restrained to opposing candidates. The polarization mood has been so intense that the distress between family and friends intensified by mediation of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp (DAGATTI; SARGENTINI, 2018). The physical distance of the technological mediation seems to have uninhibited voters that relied much more on a defense of the frank speech, with no boundaries, rather than the extensive discussions of the civility projects in debate in the twenty-first century, regarding the politically correct ways of speaking. The ease to create anonymous profiles provided by social media and the impossibility of the aggressor in seeing who they are attacking provide conditions for the aggressiveness to increase (PALFREY; GRASSER, 2008).

Ruth Amossy (2017) proposes some parameters for articulation between insults and argumentation, which enables systematizing and characterizing the mechanics of verbal aggression. According to the author, there would be seven systemic forms for the polemic enunciator (the polemicist) to impose their aggression to others:

- a. hindering others from speaking, whether by abruptly or recurrently interrupting their speech; or emphatically varying the assertion, blocking others from speaking; or asking rhetorical questions, taking away the opportunity of others to speak.
- b. disregarding or deriding the speech of others, having them reformulated, taken out of context and invalidated, losing their own coherence.
- c. directly attacking the person rather than the arguments (*ad hominem* arguments).
- d. promoting the demonization of others.
- e. when the polemicist justifies the aggression by “pathos”, the strong and aggressive emotion the opponent aroused in them.
- f. insulting their opponent, harassing them in front of an audience, seeing themselves in a superior position.
- g. inciting violence against others.

Violence, for the author, is functional – “it is not savage and unmotivated, but it meets certain functions in verbal trades that frame and regulate it” (AMOSSY, 2017,

⁵ Available at: <https://epocanegocios.globo.com/Brasil/noticia/2018/09/eleicoes-2018-que-candidato-presidente-bateu-e-apanhou-mais-nas-redes-sociais.html>. Access on: 2 mar. 2022.

p. 201) – and coercive, once it is differently tolerated in political debates, candidates' websites, and social media. By the existence of self-regulation, violence becomes ineffective if it trespasses the limits of a tacit violence. The polemic-considered violence can only be expressed within the limits of a social and institutional game, under the risk of having whoever extrapolates the ethical and legal limits becoming liable of receiving warnings from Ethics Committees, or a formal report in legal processes. However, in the society of the spectacle (DEBORD, 1994), such as the one we live in, all boundaries are overstepped to ensure visibility. Such actions demand support from authoritarian structures - even totalitarian ones - so they can thrive, and violence, over time, becomes natural.

The 2014 and 2018 electoral campaigns are characterized by aggressiveness; although in different intensity degrees, both aimed at thriving in the elections, but through different pathways. This is what we intend to present as it follows.

2014 electoral campaign: aggressiveness in tones of false harmonies

Feuds befit the political discourses, especially during elections. They may occur in different forms and different strategies. The presidential electoral campaign of 2014, in Brazil, was characterized by indirect attacks between opposing candidates. Over the debates organized by television networks and the Free Electoral Propaganda Time (HGPE), aggressiveness materialized into addressing of accusations to opposing candidates, critiques to partisan stances, ways of talking about themselves to disqualify others, rebuking of the opponents and rectification of their statements, strategically applied irony, and insinuations or allusions.

Irony played the leading role as the main form of materializing aggressiveness. Irony as a resource was present in three forms of the aggressive phrasing, categorized as (i) rebuking of the opponent and rectification of their statements, (ii) formulating speeches about themselves to disqualify others, and (iii) expressing insinuations and allusions⁶.

About the 2014 campaign, Chiari (2017, p.122) states that “aggressiveness started to be surveilled, its effects were restrained due to the position occupied by the enunciators, who spoke from an official place, which allowed them to say certain things, withholding others”. For analytical purposes, we provide some excerpts of the televised electoral debates that corroborate with the production of an indirect aggressiveness, marked by false harmony.

The indirect attacks in the invectives against opponents were frequent in the televised electoral debates in 2014, verbalized by the rebuking of opponents and the

⁶ These categories were developed after the parameters proposed by Amossy (2017), but they have been modified and broadened, fitting to the *corpus* related to the 2014 electoral campaign. They have been analyzed in the dissertation “Between insults and false harmonies: the constructions of aggressiveness effects in the electoral political discourse in the 2014 campaign”.

correction of their phrasing. Let us verify some of the occurrences identified in the debates⁷:

Statement 1 Dilma Rouseff: Candidate, I always like to ask about Pronatec. Why do I like Pronatec, candidate? Because Pronatec solves several issues and challenges. You have designed a law forbidding the federal government of building and maintaining technical schools. You were the leader of the FHC administration. Will you keep on with that policy? (Globo debate – October 24, 2014- 00:24:41)⁸

Statement 2 Aécio Neves: I didn't want to have to correct you in public, but I was the leader of PSDB, but let's let that slide, let's cut some slack" (Globo debate – October 24, 2014 – 00:25:14)

Statement 3 Dilma Rouseff: Same difference. (Globo debate – October 24, 2014 – 00:25:19)

Statement 4 Aécio Neves: Yeah, kind of, candidate. To those who don't know the National Congress, maybe; but yeah, they are quite different. (Globo debate – October 24, 2014 – 00:25:21)

The statement “I didn't want to have to correct you in public, but I was the leader of PSDB, but let's let that slide, let's cut some slack” brings the following discursive sequences: “I didn't X, but X”. In this excerpt, candidate Dilma attests that Aécio was the leader of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) administration, who afterwards corrects her, declaring he had been the leader of the Brazilian Social-Democratic Party (PSDB). In this statement, there is a sentence structure that denies the interest in rectifying, but moreover brings up the very correction previously denied, thus building a higher-value argument. Such a statement, despite using the given polite forms, produces effects of aggressiveness, restating the rectification of others in public to disqualify them.

Another similar sequence appears in these statements:

Statement 5 Dilma Rouseff: “So, candidate, I'm sorry, but you have talked and talked, and haven't said anything concrete” (Globo debate – October 24, 2014 – 00:34:38)

Statement 6 Dilma Rouseff “Well, I beg your pardon, but I'll agree with the comedian José Simão: you are taking the State to put up a show,

⁷ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pyO1KPMiOo>. Access on: 10 jan. 2017. All idioms and conversational expressions used by the candidates in the analyzed statements were freely translated to the closest idioms in the English language, given the cultural background of the translator. Language variation, metaphors and common sayings are included, even though they have been kept according to most of the grammatical structures of English language.

⁸ The transcriptions have been made disregarding records of orality or language variation; they are solely reproductions of the speech into written form.

'My bath, my life'. That's what you've got". (Globo Network – October 24, 2014 – 00:53:08')

The excerpts “I didn't want to have to correct you” and “I beg your pardon”, followed by the adversative conjunction “but”, present themselves as triggers to tell the supposed “truth”. These argumentative strategies work as a way of asking for permission to say what is considered “true”, producing effects of frankness or aggressiveness. The mechanism of engineering this will of truth expresses that there are games of truth that lead some statements to be taken as truthful and others not, most of the time the criteria is to attribute truthfulness to who is taking over the enunciative function.

Another form of indirect aggressiveness, very frequent in debates, was candidates talking about themselves to disqualify others. The parameters are not explicit in the categories proposed by Amossy (2017), maybe because it has not occurred so frequently in the debates analyzed by the author, differently from what happened in Brazil in 2014. We verified the presence of a group of statements that disqualify the opponent by the affirmations the subjects state about themselves. Let us see some phrasings from candidate Dilma:

Statement 7 Dilma Rousseff: (1) “I'm not going to outsource responsibilities” (Globo debate - October 24, 2014 – 00:47:50)

Statement 8 Dilma Rousseff: (2) “Candidate, I'm proud of having a life with no relatives hired, no improper use of public money in properties of mine or of my family's” (Globo debate – October 24, 2014 – 00:20:30)

Statement 9 Dilma Rousseff: (3) “I, candidate, don't drive under the influence of alcohol and other drugs”. (SBT debate – October 16, 2014 – 00:15:00)

“Outsourcing responsibilities” (1), “Improper use of public money” (1), “Nepotism” (2), “Driving under the influence of alcohol and other drugs” (3), apart from being negatively seen actions by our society, they allude, to some extent, to accusations - circulated in some newspapers and websites - that Aécio had been involved in nepotism actions, accusations of driving inebriated, drug consumption, etc.

Statements like these, constituted of denials that distance the enunciator from situations that are “negatively seen” by society, while they cast positive images of themselves, inserting themselves in a superior position in contrast to their rival, build the image of a reckless, irresponsible opponent, and, therefore, unable to take office of the Presidency of the Republic.

Foucault (2010), analyzing the arts of government from the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries through the manuals made for princes, reveals that, in order to be a good governor, it is necessary to be a good self-governor, in the words of the author:

How can one govern the Prince in such a way that he will be able to govern himself and others? (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 47).

But both cases involve addressing them, speaking to them, telling them the truth, convincing them of the truth, and thereby governing their souls, the souls of those who have to govern others (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 226).

What must he improve, develop, and work on? Himself, so as to make himself *emphron* and *symphonos* (that is to say: thoughtful and wise, moderate). He must ensure that he is in harmony, in symphony, in *symphonos* with himself [...] (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 269).

In 2014 the candidates relied on strategies to build an image of themselves associated with efficiency and balance. In statement 9, for instance, the affirmation of the candidate of not driving under the influence of drugs builds an image attached to balance, as in knowing how to govern herself, while the other is characterized as unbalanced, someone who does not know how to govern himself, which makes him unable of governing others.

We then verify that the aggressive phrasing rarely occurs directly over the debates in 2014. Rather, there is another very frequent form of indirect aggressiveness in this clash: expressing insinuations or allusions. Let us see an occurrence of it in the third part of the Bandeirantes Network debate, broadcast on October 14, 2014, in which Dilma addresses to Aécio:

Statement 10 Dilma Rousseff: I wanted to ask you about how you see the issues on violence against women. To me it is a fundamental commitment. I believe the violence that affects women strikes households, destroys family bonds, and also harms young people and children. It should be fought in all of its dimensions. The Maria da Penha law was a great step forward in this direction, approved in the administration of President Lula and reapproved in mine, since we've won in the Supreme Court. If you look at the issue on violence against women, would you be capable of extinguishing the secretariat that protects women's right in the Federal Government? What would you do to ensure that the fight against violence continues?

Had we not known of the attacks addressed to Aécio, accusing him of beating his ex-girlfriend, we could have considered Dilma's inquiry a generic question, related solely to public policies. There is a seemingly debate of ideas that promotes the discussion of a general theme in politics: public policies that fight violence against women; however, Dilma's question would evoke other memories, another knowledge, one of them is the story that Aécio had allegedly assaulted his ex-girlfriend. The "generic" question re-updates such knowledge and produces effects of aggressiveness; and depictions

of a candidate that does not respect women. The provocation, thereby, is formulated under the appearance of a question or allusion.

The aggressiveness of the 2014 campaign was often materialized into ironies, allusions, among other forms that “concealed” it, making it indirect, while it was already blazing trails for the aggressive phrasing to take other paths: the shortcut of frank speech was one of them. While in 2014 the aggressiveness was marked by embroidered phrasings, false harmonies, in 2018 the direct attack was the choice, the insult disguised in frankness.

The description of these statements, frequent in this campaign, shows us the constructions of a series, marked by discursive practices that weave a regularity in the discursive thread - false harmony, in which the subject enunciating takes the functions of telling the “true” in an indirect, ironic way, insinuating while talking about themselves to disqualify the others, or asking questions alluding to accusations.

The 2018 electoral campaign: insults under the aegis of frank speech

After our analyses concerning the 2018 electoral campaign in comparison to the 2014 campaign, it was observed that there has been a use of frank and/or aggressive speech, despite the notes of false harmonies. The debates, for instance, were based on attacks towards personal presentations, political stances, accusations, the continuous labeling of communism, and the use of customs agenda as a weapon.

We begin by presenting some analyses concerning the attacks towards personal presentation, which (de)characterize the candidates’ behavior, stance, or speech. We shall see that some statements are characterized by a straight-forward phrasing, in which aggressiveness is materialized into the following accusatory phrasings:

Statement 11 Boulos: “Congressman Bolsonaro, Brazil knows you are a racist, sexist, and homophobic. (Bandeirantes Network Debate - August 9, 2018 - 00:56:56)⁹

Statement 12 Boulos: “Look, Meirelles, first, actually, having you talking about working seems very odd to me because you are a banker, and bankers don’t work, right? And it seems even odder because you are one of the responsible for so many unemployed people in the country” (Globo Network Debate - October 4, 2018 - 00:13:50)

Statement 13 Marina Silva: “Bolsonaro has an authoritarian, antidemocratic attitude, he disrespects women, he disrespects indigenous people, he disrespects black people, he disrespects the entire Brazilian population. But, in his words, he also disrespects the Constitution, he disrespects the

⁹ Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EnJeUKwX_c. Access on: 2 mar. 2022.

democratic game. In a democracy, if it can't be proved that there has been fraud, one can't join the game if you are doing so to win by all means. To me, Bolsonaro's words, apart from being disrespectful to democracy, can only mean one thing: Bolsonaro speaks bravely, but there are some moments that he chickens out. And he chickens out indeed, because these are words of someone who's already afraid of being defeated". (Record Network Debate - September 30, 2018 - 01:16:24)¹⁰

In the statements (11) and (2) we verify a regular discursive sequence, in a predicative relation of a subject followed by the verb in the present tense and its attributes:

...ist
X é ...phobic
...er

Such kind of utterances became regular in the 2018 elections, differing in many aspects from the 2014 elections, in which indirect aggressiveness was more frequent, especially in the constant use of irony. While in 2014 the discursive sequences were embellished, built after "insults" followed by apologies, which produced the false harmony effects, in 2018, by discursive sequences as "X is Y", produce labeling, direct aggressiveness effects, with no apparent attempt to minimize its effects. The suffixes, as listed above (-ist, -phobe) - also frequently used in the 1989 campaign - , collaborate with the production of aggressive and categorical utterances, placing (and restraining) each candidate into a certain position, whether it is "homophobic", "sexist", "leftist", and so on. Differently from the previous elections, in which the direct conflict was avoided, replacing "you" by formal pronouns, or "candidate", in 2018 the pronoun "you" is frequently use, producing effects of absence of hierarchy and aggressive proximity. Still regarding statement 11, it is noticeable the variation of the expression "everybody knows" into "the whole Brazil knows", working as a discursive strategy that produces effects of evidence, truth, and given data.

In statement 13, candidate Bolsonaro's attitude is also disqualified by another regular sequence

X { [Candidate's Name or He] **disrespects** Y { women
indigenous people
black people

This statement produces some effects of direct aggressiveness just by attributing attitudes to the candidate that counteracts democratic values.

¹⁰ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWAwTpd7IEc>. Access on: 4 mar. 2022.

Afterwards, it is attributed to the candidate the “brave speech”, and the action of “chickening out”, thereby constituting what Amossy (2017) identifies as *ad hominem* argument, for it attacks the person instead of their thesis, focusing on their characteristics or personality. The emphatic repetition of the words “chicken out” and “disrespect” increase the intensity of the aggressive statement.

Regarding the attacks on partisan stances, the Workers Party - PT and the overall left-wing parties seemed to be the target. These are some statements in which critiques to the left have been made:

Statement 14 Alckmin “Look, this is the level of the candidate that represents, okay, the candidate for the presidency of the Republic. I have 40 years of public life, I’ve always worked, I have never been idle, I have never invaded properties, I have never been convicted; 40 years of public life, a clean life, the school lunch was discovered by us” (SBT Network Debate - September 26, 2018 - 00:14:10)¹¹

Statement 15 Meirelles “The team I’ve gathered [...] has gained millions of jobs in Brazil, but they created millions of jobs for those who actually work, right? It isn’t for those ahead of the riots and who are looking into occupying the land of others, who have worked so hard, isn’t it true? (Rede TV Network Debate - August 17, 2018 - 00:14:10)¹²

Statement 16 Boulos: “Like yourself, Meirelles. How can the people trust you are fighting against corruption when you are part of Temer’s gang, Temer’s party?” (Globo Network Debate - October 4, 2018 - 00:12:09)
Meirelles: “I’m the candidate who is part of his own history. And my history is the history of someone who works, to begin with. I know it may seem odd to you, working. I work, I work hard, and I have no corruption accusations.” (Globo Network Debate - October 4, 2018 - 00:12:30)

We have verified in these statements the production of an indirect aggressiveness, which, as a matter of fact, has been a broadly used argumentative strategy by the PSDB, and, in these elections, by the Brazilian Democratic Movement - MDB as well, parties that present a right-wing stance. When the left is criticized, they rely on “talking about themselves to disqualify the others”, such as in statement 14, in which Alckmin states that he has always worked, he has not been idle, nor invaded properties; or in statement 16, when Meirelles states that his is a history of someone who works and has no corruption accusations. Such “self-affirmations” are argumentative strategies that compose the “allusion”, and produce effects of a scathing aggressiveness, even though it is still indirect.

¹¹ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSgq-tZiAkU>. Access on: 4 mar. 2022.

¹² Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99SmMo1XqzQ>. Access on: 4 mar. 2022.

There is a historic construction that, on the regularities of its events, attributes idleness, trespassing, and disorder to the left. Such statements bolster these built-in images and effects slid towards the candidate of the Solidarity Party – PSOL, who would supposedly stand by it.

In statements 15 and 16, aggressiveness also materializes into irony, when Meirelles says (15) that jobs have been created for those who work, responding to a direct accusation from candidate Boulos, attacking him saying that when the MDB candidate was in the administration, unemployment had increased. In statement 16, also responding to a direct accusation of being part of a corruption gang, it is phrased “I know it may seem odd to you, working”, ironically alluding to the image of left-wing people do not work, and rebutting, to some extent, the accusation that bankers do not work.

The argumentative strategies marked by irony, allusion, producing effects of indirect aggressiveness, have not been used in these elections, while aggressiveness, understood many times as frankness, has gained space and visibility in the campaigns. As it is seen in the statements, “false harmony” is replaced by direct and intolerant aggressiveness, the corruption theme, so strongly discussed in previous elections, is outshined by polemic themes regarding customs agenda, such as taboos like sexuality and religion.

The argumentative strategy of dealing with polemic themes can be observed in the following statements:

Statement 17 Bolsonaro: “This isn’t a debate among friends, these are men who believe in God, that respects the family, and, moving onward with the issue of gender ideology, which wants to teach sex to our children starting by the age of six, like I found out in 2010, the infamous gay kit, which had movies, posters, books of boys kissing each other and girls touching each other, to be given to our 6-year-old children. This, in my understanding, is a crime. A father doesn’t want to get home to find his son playing with dolls under the influence of school. With all the respect I have, to everyone, I don’t care about your opinion. What is your stance on it, Daciolo? (Rede TV Network Debate - August 17, 2018 - 00:55:30)

Statement 18 Daciolo: “My stance is also against it. I’m against it and I’m alerting the population once more, talking about the words of the Lord, I’m not here to preach [...] “God created the man in his own image; male and female he created them” and said “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it”, men and women, family, I’m in favor of the traditional Brazilian family, for the honor and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rede TV Network Debate - August 17, 2018 - 00:56:40)¹³

¹³ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99SmMo1XqzQ>. Access on: 4 mar. 2022.

Some of the polemic themes approached were about family, gender ideology, content taught in classrooms. Candidate Bolsonaro, although mentioning aspects that put him in favor of religious speech, is closer to a moralist stance, in favor of good customs.

An attack strategy used by Bolsonaro to discredit candidate Haddad was the themes related to the “Gay Kit”, attributing the creation of such material to be distributed in schools to the PT candidate. The Social-Liberal Party – PSL candidate, by accusing Haddad of promoting “gender ideology”, inserts himself in a prejudiced, moralist discursive stance, contrary to freedom of sexual orientation supported by LGBT movements. Relying on a moralist discourse, Bolsonaro attacks his opponents, especially the PT candidate, promoting hatred towards “ideology” and “homosexuals”.

Whereas Bolsonaro strikes from a moralist stance, Corporal Daciolo takes a religious turn. Daciolo, just like Bolsonaro, has been in the military; however, his gestures and speech tend to be religious instead of a proper military discourse. In his speech, military and religious discourses are merged, endowing the discursive stance in favor of the “traditional family” and contrary to LGBT people. There has also been a contradiction in this statement, once the subject denies the action of “preaching”, while constantly mentioning biblical texts as a weapon, as in “I’m not here to preach [...] God created man in his own image; male and female he created” [...]I’m in favor of the traditional Brazilian family, for the honor and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Bolsonaro constantly questions his opponents regarding polemic themes, drawing away the possibilities of debating other important ones, such as environmentalism, economic policies, amongst several others.

The bolsonarist discourse presents itself as the one with the power and the knowledge to say what should or should not be taught in schools. The “gay kit”, or “book of indecencies”, such as the “ideological bias” were heavily fought and used as strike weapons. The semantic-discursive association between “gay kit” and “books about indecencies” disqualifies the presence of homosexuals in society, grating a deprecating moral value to practices of sexuality,

According to Sargentini & Chiari (2019), the most direct aggressive phrasings - organized in sequences, associated with exhaustive repetition, and built over the years - that the PT, the left, is communist, corrupt, deceitful and troublesome; and that the right is elitist, overbearing and dissimulated, produced hatred and aversion to these political stances, having the *will to truth* (FOUCAULT, 2010) of the time based on the antonyms of the characteristics attributed to them, especially to the left. If the PT is deceitful, the required quality is authenticity and frankness; if the PT is “troublesome”, order is then sought; if the PT is corrupt, honesty is longed. If the PT presents a strategy of “Lullie¹⁴ love and peace”, aggressiveness is sought. Such attributes “coincided” with the image created around Bolsonaro, which made him eligible in such conjuncture.

¹⁴ This is a nickname given to former president Lula, the translation followed the patterns of morphological transformations of English language.

However, this materialized hatred and aggressiveness, mostly in Bolsonaro's speech, are not strongly exhibited in broadcast debates, after all the candidate disrupts with the traditional means of doing politics, starting to use Facebook, Twitter, audio recordings spread in different mediums, etc.

In the absence of debate, aggressiveness through messages

On the second turn of the 2018 elections there has been a suspension of the debates in virtue of the refusal of one of the candidates - Bolsonaro, in this case - in participating on the programs due to his recovery after being assaulted and stabbed with a knife. Although the broadcast debate has not happened, candidate Bolsonaro finds ways of speaking to his electors, he records an audio which relevance, broad dissemination, and severity of its phrasing make it an inescapable object of analysis in this article.

Regarding the latter, we highlight one audio recorded by Bolsonaro in his own cellphone, which was broadcasted in several mediums, that was relayed in a vehicle sound-system during a pro-Bolsonaro march on Paulista Avenue, São Paulo, to supporters of his candidacy. The occurrence was:

Statement 19 Bolsonaro "PTards, y'all are going to the beach's end. You won't have a saying in our nation anymore. You won't have the NGOs to quench your hunger for mortadella. It will be a cleanse never seen before in the History of Brazil" (00:01:12)¹⁵

The candidate uses a fascist expression of "cleansing" the people, exterminating them, in this case the "PTards". Besides, Bolsonaro uses the expression "the beach's end", a slang referring to the Navy base where the people opposed to the military regime were interrogated, tortured, and killed. This very expression, over time, became a frequent slang amongst the "hardcore" militaries to refer to clandestine places for interrogations, torture and possibly murder.

Relying on our field of Discourse Analysis studies, we may consider some of its concepts to assist us in comprehending this statement. According to Foucault (1972), the enunciative function "cannot be without the existence of an associated field":

Any statement may be likewise specified: there is no general, free, neutral, or independent statements; but there is always a statement within a series or a group, playing a role amongst the others, relying on them, and distinguishing from them: it integrates itself in an enunciative game, whereby it has its participation, even in the slightest. (FOUCAULT, 1972, p.113-114).

¹⁵ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=at8qr1MeO6g>. Access on: 4 mar. 2022.

Courtine (2009), by the notion of “domains of memory” established by Foucault, posits the concept of discursive memory. In his own words “The notion of discursive memories refers to the historic existence of the statements within discursive practices regulated by ideological apparatuses” (COURTINE, 2009, p. 105-106). This domain would allow the repetition and the oblivion, just as the erasure of other discourses. Once the statement is not free and it is always part of a collection, a series, the expressions “beach’s end” and “cleanse” are related to a collection of other statements that are grouped within a fascist discourse. Thus, the burst of statements like these nowadays, reupdating themselves, echoes the memories of Nazi and dictatorial regimes, which sought the extermination of their opposers. Such statements produce effects that utterly exceed aggressiveness, extrapolating the limits of hate and intolerance, once they incite physical violence whose motivation is extermination, the death of opposers.

Thereby we verify that a new set of visibility apparatuses (FOUCAULT, 2014) is built, in which the aggressive phrasing puts the candidate under the spotlight.

Final Remarks

The contemporary democratic societies refused the courtesies of aristocratic regimes once they supported a less hierarchical society with equality of conditions and freedom in conducting daily life. The establishment of formal treatments and politeness rules sounds, to contemporary subjects, like “abject leftovers of hypocrisy, subordination and despotism” (ROUVILLOIS, 2008, p. 573)¹⁶. By the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have seen major formalities being discarded, even though they exist in a less accurate way within households, work environments, and institutions. As an example, we have seen in Brazil, in 2019, an action disguised as an Act that draws people away from formalities of treatment in public agencies: Act n° 9,758, April 11, 2019¹⁷. The use of polite forms is understood as notes of falsehood, forms of unnecessary regulations, and lack of authenticity from the enunciator. The distancing from polite forms leads the way to the appreciation of aggressive forms.

In our analyses we have determined that the electoral campaigns of 2014 prioritize the indirect aggressions towards the opponents, nonetheless as aggressive as the frequent attacks in 2018. Over the debates, aggressiveness has materialized into accusations, in partisan stances, personal presentations, “talking about themselves to disqualify the others”, irony, insinuation and allusions, and “rebuking the opponents and correcting

¹⁶ Translation from French to Portuguese by the authors, then translated to English.

¹⁷ Available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2019/decreto/D9758.htm. Access on: 4 mar. 2022. The act establishes the forms of treatment used in oral or written communication to public officers of the indirect and direct federal public administration; and the forms of treatment in written communication towards them, forbidding the use of the treatment pronouns: Your excellence, Your lordship, Your magnificence, doctor, illustrious, honorable, and respectable. The act determines that “the only treatment pronoun to be used in communication with public federal officers is “sir”, independently of the hierarchical level, the nature of the post or the function, or the occasion”.

their speech”. Websites and social media, in turn, presented more direct attacks, producing effects of aggressiveness and intolerance, mostly on Facebook.

There are some discursive threads that were maintained in the 2014 elections, amongst them the deconstruction of candidate Dilma by the disqualification of her party, which is constantly characterized as corrupt and “communist”. The characteristics attributed to her party are transferred to the candidate, who had been also considered corrupt, false, and deceitful. In addition to being disqualified because of the party, Dilma also deals with attacks regarding gender and personal presentation, showing that there are still discourses regarding women occupying solely private spaces in the Brazilian social imagery. Another discursive thread is the continuous attribution of elitist, privatization-oriented and unemployment-responsible images to the PSDB, materializing and emphasizing aggressiveness in accusations that the referred party has “forsaken the poor people”. All these attacks are amplified in websites - in a more managed and programmed form - and social media, focusing on the person and reducing politics to the body: woman, liar, drunk.

In the 2018 electoral campaign, aggressiveness assumed several forms, amongst them it has materialized into aggression towards personal presentation, accusations, attacks on partisan stances, which has produced effects of a “straightforward” direct aggressiveness. It was this very form of aggressiveness, sometimes understood as frankness, that gained visibility and supporters. Differently from the 2014 campaign, in which “false harmony” prevailed, in 2018 the frank, aggressive and intolerant speech was privileged. We considered that these small events we analyzed produced ruptures in the ways of phrasing, which happened alongside the fact of statements having found conditions of emergence. And, in this case, the event has a signal value (FOUCAULT, 2011), which indicates the fact of the event being able to rule over the spectators, being accepted by those around it. Thereby, the event is not of the most importance, but rather is the intent it generates, in this case it is the installing of a hate policy.

Despite the observation of distinct ways, forms, and levels of aggressive phrasing in both elections, we have seen that there had been a form of aggressiveness in 2014 that maintained what has been developed in 2018. Aggressiveness was the keynote of the 2014 campaign, mainly materialized into irony, allusions, and other forms that “concealed” it, making it indirect, while it was leading the way for the aggressive phrasing to follow other paths. Whereas in 2014 aggressiveness was marked by an embellished speech, full of false harmonies, in 2018 the shortcut was chosen, the insults disguised as frankness.

Our analyses indicate that the treatments that sound harmonic are false, once an indirect-aggression strategy has been used. However, the use of false harmony tends to express a balance in the polemic relations that are particular to the political discourse, especially in an electoral campaign scenario. The frank speech, disguised as authenticity, and – by extension – the true-self, acts as a strategy to the political discourse, revealing its authoritarianism. The polemics are superseded by words of aggression, expressions, and insulting gestures that intimidate any sort of interaction.

The frank speech is summarized by the sayings: #saidit, #slyedit. It is indicated that these terms do not open space for others to point out flaws or to insert new observations. Therefore, under the concealment of sincerity, others get silenced, harassed and publicly controlled. There is not a political game, but rather a suppression of argumentation, an attitude that reveals the authoritarian discourse at work.

SARGENTINI, V.; REIS, G. Da falsa harmonia à fala franca: as agressões verbais em campanhas eleitorais presidenciais. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v.66, 2022.

- *RESUMO: Este artigo, partindo dos pressupostos teóricos dos estudos do discurso, sob uma perspectiva foucaultiana, visa investigar o funcionamento e a possível intensificação da agressão verbal nas duas últimas campanhas eleitorais presidenciais ocorridas no Brasil nos anos de 2014 e de 2018, consideradas muito violentas pela percepção dos brasileiros. Para tal, ampara-se no conceito de acontecimento discursivo, que está estreitamente ligado às condições de emergência, uma vez que os enunciados são produzidos a partir de um regime de enunciabilidade. Esses enunciados estão inescapavelmente inscritos nos quadros históricos e sociais de sua constituição, a partir dos quais são examinados, considerando suas formulações e formas de circulação. Resultados indicam que, com base nos excertos analisados, extraídos de debates televisivos das campanhas eleitorais de 2014 e de 2018, a construção discursiva de uma falsa harmonia tende a expressar um equilíbrio nas relações polêmicas próprias do discurso político, em especial em situação de campanha eleitoral. A fala franca, por sua vez, sob a máscara da autenticidade, e, por extensão, do ser-verdadeiro, atua como uma estratégia do discurso político reveladora do discurso autoritário, vindo a obliterar a possibilidade de um jogo político pautado em trocas argumentativas.*
- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: discurso político; campanha eleitoral; agressividade; violência verbal; fala franca.*

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