

**Racial quotas in letters from readers of the “Caros Amigos” magazine: a dialogic perspective / *Cotas raciais em cartas de leitores da revista Caros Amigos: uma perspectiva dialógica***

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**ABSTRACT**

In this article we intend to demonstrate some results obtained in our dissertation, which was presented in the second semester of 2011. In the research, we analyzed texts from printed media inserted in a discursive chain of conflicts and clashes, a real platform for polemic concerning the system of quotas in Brazil. Our purpose is to analyze the way in which the dialogic interactions are generated among the participants of the discursive event: how the author dialogues with the object of discourse and with the addressee, having as the basis for our work the Bakhtin Circle’s dialogical theory of discourse. The results highlight the fact that the positioning assumed by the interlocutors is built from the value attributed to its construction by the other; the clash among the interlocutors is constitutive of the utterances; and the dialogic analysis of the media utterances contributes to a better understanding of the social nature of discourse and of the themes which are relevant to society, in this case, the quotas.

**KEYWORDS:** Dialogism; Journalistic Discourse; Quotas; Verbal Interaction

**RESUMO**

*Neste artigo pretendemos demonstrar alguns resultados obtidos em nossa tese de doutorado defendida no segundo semestre de 2011. Na pesquisa, analisamos textos da mídia impressa inseridos em uma cadeia discursiva de conflitos e embates que polemizam o sistema de cotas no Brasil. Nosso objetivo é analisar a forma como são engendradas as interações dialógicas entre os participantes do evento discursivo: como o autor dialoga com o objeto do discurso e com o destinatário, tomando por base a teoria dialógica do discurso, de Bakhtin e o Círculo. Os resultados evidenciam que o posicionamento assumido pelos interlocutores é construído a partir do valor que o outro atribui à sua construção; o embate entre os interlocutores é constitutivo dos enunciados; e a análise dialógica de enunciados da mídia contribui para uma melhor compreensão da natureza social do discurso e dos temas relevantes para a sociedade, no caso das cotas.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Dialogismo; Discurso jornalístico; Cotas; Interação verbal*

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## Initial considerations

This article is a partial result of our dissertation<sup>1</sup>, which aimed to discuss how the construction of discourse regarding the system of quotas in Brazil is built in the printed media and how it is inserted in the debate about the exclusion/inclusion of blacks in the Brazilian society.

After the enactment of Law Number 3.708, on November 9, 2001, in which the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro instituted quotas of up to 40% for black and brown university students, the issue of the so called *affirmative policies* became important in the Brazilian society and gained prominence in the press, generating many articles, reports and interviews about the new system of ethnic university entrance. The evaluative tone given to these articles prompted conflictive confrontations and motivated readers to send letters to newspapers and magazines, producing various manifestations of discursive order.

Among the printed media organizations, the cultural magazine *Caros Amigos* tended to the matter, systematically, in a controversial series published from June to November of 2002 – a period of effervescence regarding the discursive clash about exclusion, having the issue of quotas as a backdrop.

In this article, we have selected six texts – six letters from readers – that make up the magazine's controversial series -, in order to show how the construction of the discourses about quotas is made in the linguistic, enunciative and discursive processes established there.<sup>2</sup>

The theoretical and methodological basis is the dialogical theory/analysis of discourse<sup>3</sup> - as inferred from the works of M. Bakhtin and the Circle – which considers the interaction the founding principle of language that is articulated in specific historical, social and cultural contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> *The discursive construction of the quotas system in the magazine "Caros Amigos"* (FREITAS, 2011), funded by CAPES and defended in August, 2011, at Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo/PUC SP (Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo), advised by Professor Beth Brait.

<sup>2</sup> In order for us to focus on the proposed objective, we have decided not to discuss, in a direct way, in this article, the issue of race in Brazil and the socio-historical bases of the system of quotas that fit into the so called *affirmative actions policy*; nor will we mention, in an explicit way, the reflections extracted from different discourses in journalistic texts, academic articles, books, essays and dissertations, read during the development of the research that originated this article. More information about this can be found in the first chapters of our dissertation (FREITAS, 2011). Since the analysis we wanted to make is focused on texts vehiculated in the year 2002, the post-approval period of the Law number 3.708, of November 9, 2001, when the first public universities began to adopt the system of quotas, we will not discuss here the recent Law 12.711 of August 29, 2012, which disposes about the reservation of vacancies in federal institutions of education.

<sup>3</sup> BRAIT, 2012, p.9-31.

We understand, based on this analysis, that the issue of the system of quotas in the media – especially in the magazine *Caros Amigos* – is interwoven by a plurality of cultural, historical and social voices from different sources of the enunciator or of different instances that get intertwined in the thread of discourse in tense and conflictive interactions. This confrontation, aside from reflecting and refracting the controversy of the Brazilian identity, produces reflections about the way the formation of discourses and opinions of the interlocutors regarding the inclusion/exclusion of blacks in the Brazilian society is made and, therefore, allows a glimpse of socio-ideological positionings.

## 1 Dialogical theory of discourse

The dialogical theory of discourse - Bakhtin and the Circle – argues that the true essence of language is the social event of *verbal interaction* that is realized in one or more utterances and takes *dialogism* into consideration – in the full extent of the term – as being the fundamental reality of language, constitutive of all human activity and of the subject:

Dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue, laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life [...] (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.40)

For Bakhtin, the life of speech, whatever its realm of utilization (journalistic, day to day, practical, scientific, legal, artistic, etc.), is impregnated of *dialogical relationships*. Therefore, each text that we analyzed – the letters from readers – is considered a fabric of “many voices” or of many texts or discourses that are intertwined, that complement each other, answer each other or polemicize together.

Brait explains that “dialogism concerns the relations established between the *I* and the *other* in discursive processes historically initiated by the subjects that, in turn, are established and will be initiated by these discourses”<sup>4</sup> (2005a, p.95). This author explains that *dialogism* is a constitutive element of language, a principle that governs the production and the understanding of meanings on the boundary where *I/other* define each other, penetrate each other, without merging or getting mixed up with each other. She understands that the

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<sup>4</sup> Text in Portuguese: “o dialogismo diz respeito às relações que se estabelecem entre o *eu* e o *outro* nos processos discursivos instaurados historicamente pelos sujeitos, que, por sua vez, se instauram e são instaurados por esses discursos”.

Bakhtinian reflection about language – based on *relation* – contributes to a better understanding of what language is like. Since it is “social, historical and cultural, it allows glimpses of singularities, particularities, always affected, altered and impregnated by the relations that constitute them”<sup>5</sup> (BRAIT, 2005b, p.80).

From the interaction of the interlocutors involved in discursive productions comes the Circle’s explanation on the way the utterance – *the link in the chain of discursive communication* - is operated in the great social dialogue. In other words, the first fundamental peculiarity, which constitutes the utterance, is the fact that it *is directed* at an addressee:

*The word is oriented toward an addressee, toward who that addressee might be [...] Each person’s inner world and thought has is stabilized social audience that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values, and so on are fashioned (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p. 85-86). (The italics are the author’s)*

In this sense, the utterance always has an *author* and an addressee – “of various sorts, with varying degrees of proximity, concreteness, awareness, and so forth – whose responsive understanding the author of the speech work seeks and surpasses” (BAKHTIN, 2010b, p.126).

In the case of the analyzed letters, the author is a reader that writes to the magazine resuming the discourse – of some article or even a letter published earlier – so he can take a stand in relation to the object of discourse.

The addressee, according to the perspective of the Circle, can be considered in different dimensions: *concrete addressee* – partner and direct interlocutor of the dialogue; a “second” supposed addressee, who is constituted in the event of the utterance – *presumed addressee* (not necessarily presumed by the author). And, aside from this “second” addressee, the author of the utterance proposes, with a higher or lower level of awareness, a *superaddressee* – “the third.” It is an addressee “as an escape” that, in different times, under different conceptions of the world, according to the circumstances, takes on a certain concrete ideological feature, that is, takes on a real identity: history, people, consciousness, truth, God, science (BAKHTIN, 2010b).

Moreover, according to the dialogical theory of discourse, every understanding of the active speech, of the live utterance, has an *actively responsive* nature: it mandatorily generates an answer – the listener becomes a speaker. This process can be explained this way:

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<sup>5</sup> Text in Portuguese: “sendo social, histórica, cultural, deixa entrever singularidades, particularidades, sempre afetadas, alteradas, impregnadas pelas relações que as constituem”.

the reader of the magazine, after noticing and understanding the linguistic meaning of the discourse, simultaneously occupies an *active responsive position*: he agrees with it, totally or partially disagrees with it, completes it, gets ready to use it. He becomes a speaker: he addresses the enunciator through a letter.

In other words, after entering the chain of discursive communication, the writer of the letter uses discourses of others, already marked by *assessments/intonations*, to build with them his own discourse and to assume an *evaluative position* in relation to the position of the other. This does not mean that the speaker simply uses the linguistic forms employed by the other, he establishes dialogical relationships with the other's discourse – assimilating it, reworking it and re-accentuating it according to his worldview, his value judgments, and his emotions.

## 2 Verbal interaction in letters from readers

The six letters – from the controversial series of *Caros Amigos* – are verbal units that produce meaning, belong to the journalistic realm and to the letter genre – more specifically the opinion letter - and have features of the dialogical discourse. In other words, in general, the authors use the discourse of the other to dialogue with it, assessing it, interpreting it, sprinkling it with their expressive intonations, their sense of humor, their irony, their support or their denegation.

The first letter was written by a couple from an unidentified location: He is a Law student; she is a pharmacist. This is how they express themselves:

After reading César Benjamim's excellent article, in the last edition of *Caros Amigos*, entitled "Caminhos Tortuosos," which talked about the idea of creating quotas to assure the presence of *blacks* in the public sectors, I had a feeling of intellectual impotence, because *I am black* and I am sure *that if I had* the opportunity to study in good schools, I wouldn't *need* quotas to be approved in public service entrance exams.

Talking about this subject with friends, (of various "colors"), we *got to* the beginning of the history of Brazil, when the dominant class and the *slave class* were separated according to skin color. The mix began when the white master impregnated the black woman slave for the first time... and five hundred years later the mix is not complete yet... Today it isn't possible to separate the master from the slave according to skin color. *We are* all a "mix." *Our* biggest doubt is: Won't these quotas separate what was not homogenized in five hundred years? Won't we formalize a type of *racism* that could disappear if the public schools were able to educate citizens in their most perfect conception and allow them to be approved without special

conditions? The Constitution itself (5<sup>th</sup> article) makes *us* equal, so why do we need to start the *segregation*? Imagine two queues for exam enrollment – one for blacks and the other for whites –, the beginning of the separation. How would the approved *blacks* be perceived? Would they be considered truly capable? Would they be marginalized because they were benefited with 20 percent of college spots?

Thinking about the multitude of possible combinations of human genes to form a DNA strand, what would be the interpretation of the law for blood siblings whose parents are of mixed races - one parent is *black* and the other is white – and were born in *different “colors”*? The “*darker*” one would have the right to enroll along with the 20-percent quota people and the “*lighter*” one wouldn’t? What will happen to the “*browns*”?

We *would like* a lawyer, a congressman or a senator to enlighten *us*. We *hope* that this *law* that separates “people” is not approved so that, in the future, our “*coffee-with-milk*” kids can live in a more tolerant country, free from prejudices. H.F.O. law student; M. V. W., pharmacist (the quotation marks are the author’s and the italics are ours).

In this letter, the author (the couple) addresses a real addressee: the magazine *Caros Amigos* and a presumed addressee: writers, editors, illustrators, in short, the magazine’s entire editorial board, as well as potential readers and authors of other texts about quotas. The author shares the same opinion as César Benjamim – journalist, writer of the magazine – who takes a stand against the adoption of a quota system in an article published in the previous edition.

At the beginning of the text, after agreeing with this writer’s point of view, in a responsive attitude, the letter’s author is taking a stand before all the other discourses that are favorable to the quota system and is commiserating with them. At the same time, the author seems contrary to all the interlocutors who are not favorable to the quota system. Even though the letter contains two signatures, the introduction of the author as an enunciative subject can be seen in the first paragraph, through the use of “I” and of the verb “am,” markers of the first person singular “I”: “[The article] *I* had a feeling of intellectual impotence, because *I am black* and I am sure *that* if *I had* the opportunity to study in good schools, I wouldn’t *need* quotas to be approved in public service entrance exams...”

In other moments of the utterance, the author uses the first person plural “we” – sometimes inclusive (including himself and the potential readers), sometimes exclusive (including himself, but excluding the readers). The use of “we” occurs through different enunciative markers (the verb “got to” and the possessive adjective “our”) in the utterances below:

Talking about this subject with friends, (of various “colors”), we *got to* the beginning of the history of Brazil, when the dominant class and the *slave class* were separated according to skin color.

[...]

*Our* biggest doubt is: won't these quotas separate what was not homogenized in five hundred years?

It can be noticed that, in the utterances above, “we” includes only the author of the text (the couple) and his friends – with whom he kept a dialogical interaction -, but excludes the other interlocutors.

In other utterances, “we” is inclusive, for aside from the author including himself, he also includes the presumed addressees:

Won't *we* formalize a type of racism [...]? The Constitution itself (5<sup>th</sup> article) makes *us* equals, so why do we need to start the segregation?

There are also utterances in which the author includes only himself – the couple – and excludes the other potential interlocutors:

*We would like* a lawyer, a congressman or a senator to enlighten *us*. *We hope* that this law that separates “people” is not approved so that, in the future, our “*coffee-with-milk*” kids can live in a more tolerant country, free from prejudices.

At another point, the author uses the *rhetoric direct speech* – through a series of questions – in which the intonation gives the other's speech an *evaluative position*, that is, it signals an evaluation that opposes the other values affirmed in this enunciative context.

Talking about this subject with friends, (of various “colors”), we *got to* the beginning of the history of Brazil, when the dominant class and the *slave class* were separated according to skin color. [...]. *We are* all a “*mix*” [...]. The Constitution itself (5<sup>th</sup> article) makes *us* equal, so why do we need to start the *segregation*? [...]. Thinking about the multitude of possible combinations of human genes to form a DNA strand, what would be the interpretation of the law for blood siblings whose parents are of mixed races – one parent is *black* and the other is white – and were born in *different “colors”*? The “*darker*” one would have the right to enroll along with the 20-percent quota people and the “*lighter*” one wouldn't? What will happen to the “*browns*”? [...]. *We would like* a lawyer, a congressman or a senator to enlighten *us*. *We hope* that this law that separates “people” is not approved so that, in the future, our “*coffee-with-milk*” kids can live in a more tolerant country, free from prejudices.

When the author expresses his doubts through a series of questions and then asks for explanations, we can resort to Amorim's explanations when she says that it is the doubt that makes the signature even more important, meaning that the author might not acknowledge that a certain thought is valid, that is, he could doubt it. Thus it is the doubt that convenes the subject's responsibility in the act of acknowledgement of a thought (AMORIM, 2009, p.37).

The author also maintains a dialogical interaction with discourses that fit into *history and memory* when he goes back to the discourse of slavery; when he resorts to the authorized argument of the Law (Federal Constitution), of the lawyers, congressmen and senators (representatives of the laws and of power), and of Science (genetic and DNA strand). In this case, he addresses a *superaddressee* – Law and Science – with the intention of obtaining an absolutely true responsive understanding, presupposed either in a distant historical time or in a distant metaphysical time.

To refer to blacks, the author uses lexical choices with an *evaluative accent* of a moderate tone, as we have highlighted in the letter reproduced above: “of various colors,” “mixed,” “of different colors,” “darker,” “lighter,” “brown,” “coffee-with-milk.” This assessment takes us to the Circles's approaches that emphasize “[...] expressive intonation, which colors every word of the utterance, reflects its historical uniqueness. [...] Of course, expressive intonation is not obligatory, but it is the most distinct expression of social evaluation when it does occur” (BAKHTIN/MEDVEDEV, 1978, p.122).

In this respect, the Bakhtinian theory believes that a concrete utterance can only be understood if one understands its *evaluative tone* in the ideological context it is in: “When selecting a word for an utterance we are guided by an emotional tone inherent in the individual word: we select those that in their tone correspond to the expression of our utterance and we reject others” (BAKHTIN, 2010a, p.86). It is the speakers' evaluative relationship with the object of his discourse (whatever the object) that “determines the choice of the lexical, grammatical, and compositional means of the utterance” (BAKHTIN, 2010a, p.84).

The evaluative intonation of these lexical choices – referring to blacks – hints at the existence of a euphemistic meaning effect that arises from the stand taken in this enunciative context. That is, by trying to soften the lexical choice “black,” the authors might be willing to use a politically correct language that is highly propagated in our society today.

For the grammarian Evanildo Bechara (2006), euphemism, previously considered a figure of speech constitutive of discourse in which the goal of the speaker is to minimize a



negative feeling, an unpleasant fact of reality, or to soften a word, a term, a phrase, a text, an utterance, a discourse, has currently stopped stirring the guilt of a polite interlocutor to streamline the rhetoric strategy, in order to divert or mask the meaning, especially when it is used in the media or in politics. Thus, the main focus of a serious and imminent fact is deviated, not to show a form of politeness, but to conceal the meaning of a given utterance or of an event in order to expand its public interface and to obtain positive results through creation and rhetorical motivation.

In this regard, Fiorin (2006) explains that the adoption of a politically correct language reveals the intention to avoid strongly negative vocabulary in relation to discriminated or ignored social groups in order to fight prejudice, alter language, and, thus, change discriminatory attitudes. However, he points out that the excessive caution in the search for euphemisms to designate these groups called “minorities” can reveal the existence of prejudice rooted in society itself.

The second letter carries the reader’s first and last names, as well as the name of the city where she lives. She identifies herself as “mixed race”; she is a medical student, as one can see below.

*I am a medical student, I’ve studied in a private school and I would say that I am mixed-race. My opinion was that the improvement of social conditions and of public schools would ensure equal access to higher education, and I was afraid that the quota system would promote discrimination and encourage it in the universities. After reading the article “Ideologia Tortuosa” by Sueli Carneiro in the edition of July, 2002, I totally changed my views on the subject: I agree that the damages to the black population were too many and of such a great magnitude that they will last for many years. I’m still afraid of discrimination in the universities because of the quota system, but we know that it already exists without it. Should we make the black population wait more years for social equality? E. G. Recife, PE (the italics are ours).*

The author establishes herself as the subject using the first person verb form: “*I am a medical student, I’ve studied in a private school and I would say that I am mixed-race.*” The verb form “I would say” brings an evaluative tone of uncertainty in relation to her identity when she declares she is mixed-race. She keeps on using the first person throughout the letter; however, at the end, she uses the inclusive “we,” which appears twice, when she includes herself and the other interlocutors – readers (white and black), authors and the magazine: “I’m still afraid of discrimination in the universities because of the quota system,

but *we know* that it already exists without it. Should we make the black population wait more years for social equality?”

The reader admits that she “totally” changed her views on the subject of the quota system after reading an article by Sueli Carneiro, who stood in favor of the system. This article was published in the previous issue. “After reading the article “Ideologia Tortuosa” by Sueli Carneiro in the edition of July, 2002, *I totally changed* my views on the subject”.

The adverb “totally” colors the evaluative tone of the author that “totally changed her views on the subject,” which supports the assumption that, before reading the article, she was against the quota policy and, afterwards, became in favor of it. The received influence and the stance taken in relation to the other’s discourse are explained by Bakhtin’s approach, when he points out that, by establishing dialogical relationships with the other’s discourse, the author faces, at least, two *evaluative tones*. The discursive subject perceives himself in a collectivity – in the world, in humanity, in the nation, in society, in the family – and needs the perception of the other to be complete (BAKHTIN, 1990).

Furthermore, the letter echoes things already said by the collective memory, because it approaches issues from the historical past such as racial segregation – slavery – and the fight for equality (Civil and Human Rights), as we can observe in the utterances:

I agree that the *damages to the black population* were too many and of such a great magnitude that they will *last for many years*.

I’m still afraid of *discrimination* in the universities because of the quota system.

Should we *make the black population wait more years for social equality?*

This last question, probably directed at a superaddressee, is a mark of double-voicedness, because the author discusses, in a roundabout way, the affirmation of the other that is in favor of the quota system.

The third letter brings the signature and the name of the reader’s hometown. She identifies herself as “poor and black” and takes a stand that is similar to César Benjamim’s – against the quotas.

On the political matter of quotas for *blacks*, I agree with César Benjamin and I am *ardently against it*. I would just like to emphasize that *I am poor and black* and that *my life* is as difficult as a poor white person’s. It is necessary to fight for good public schools, not to approve policies that tend

to intensify racism in Brazil. J. S. - Feira de Santana, BA (the italics are ours).

With the verbal form “I agree” [along with César Benjamim], the author establishes herself as the subject and she uses the first person throughout the rest of the letter. The evaluative tone given to her position is expressed in the adverb “ardently,” used to intensify the adjective “against”: “[...] *I agree* with César Benjamin and I am *ardently against it*.” This reader believes that the issue of social exclusion is not a problem that should be solved by the “skin color” criterion, but by the socioeconomic criterion, as we can observe by reading the letter.

The fourth letter, aside from the signature and the name of the city, bears the author’s profession:

As a teacher *who exercises the role of principal* in a municipal school in a rural area, near the city of Correntina, Bahia, *I am able* to notice, on a day to day basis, the *great injustice* committed against the blacks of this country. *We are* the continuation of a race that, through the centuries, was *forced to serve, to smile and to agree, getting nothing, absolutely nothing in return*. Now we don’t want just the friendly social interaction, free from prejudice. The *past grants us greater credit*. In order to *redeem the debt*, blacks should have the right to the quota system and also to a *greater privilege in relation to all social rights that exist in the country* so that the dominant white class, with its admirers, can begin to *pay their eternal debt to blacks*. P.R. R. S. - Correntina, BA (the italics are ours)

The identification of the author’s profession “As a teacher who exercises the role of principal in a municipal school in a rural area” gives the utterance a tone of authority.

In the beginning, the author of the letter uses the third person – that Benveniste (1995; 1965/1989) considers the *non-person*. Then he establishes himself as the subject, using the first person singular verbal form: “I am able”: “As a teacher *who exercises the role of principal* in a municipal school in a rural area, near the city of Correntina, Bahia, *I am able* to notice, on a day to day basis, the *great injustice* committed against the blacks of this country”.

Then he uses the first person plural with the exclusive “we,” because he only includes himself and the other blacks, but excludes the interlocutors that are not Black: “*We are* the continuation of a race that, through the centuries, was forced to serve, to smile and to agree, getting nothing, absolutely nothing in return. Now *we don’t want* just the friendly social interaction, free from prejudice”.

And in the end he uses again the third person, that is, the Benvenistianian non-person: *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, 8 (1): 41-58, Jan./Jun. 2013.

In order to redeem the debt, *blacks* should have the right the quota system and also to a greater privilege *in relation to all social rights that exist in the country* so that the dominant white class, with its admirers, can begin to *pay their eternal debt to blacks*.

The controversial aspect of the lexical choices in this letter reveals a dialogical interaction built under great strain of social voices, such as: the oppression of the slave class - “through the centuries, was forced to serve, to smile and to agree”; the resentful moral – “getting nothing, absolutely nothing in return”; the social debt with ancestry - “the past grants us greater credit,” “in order to redeem the debt,” “begin to pay their eternal debt to blacks”; the acknowledgement - “grants us greater credit,” “should have the right to the quota system and also to a greater privilege.” These are lexical choices that reassemble the ancestral discourse about the exclusion of blacks in the Brazilian society.

The fifth letter bears the reader’s signature and his email address. The introduction of the author as subject of the discourse happens in the beginning of the text, with the use of the first person singular verb form “forgive me,” which goes on throughout the letter. The letter’s concrete addressee is the author of the second letter, who identified himself as teacher/principal of a public municipal school in a rural area:

*Forgive me, reader Paulo Roberto, but to say “that the dominant white class can begin to pay....” I agree that the history of blacks in Brazil is disgusting; however, social justice means equality without privileges to anybody. What about guys like me? I am white, I was born in the countryside, I’ve studied in a public school, I’ve taken a vocational course at night, I’ve been working since I was 11 years old and nowadays I wake up at 5 in the morning, I walk thirty minutes to save cash, I arrive home at midnight and bust myself to get into a university. I also want privileges for having been born poor! Only equality can reverse this chaotic situation. G. B. C., quimerabrasil@aol.com (the italics are ours, the quotation marks are the author’s)*

What we can see in this letter is that the author uses words from somebody else’s discourse, putting them between quotation marks and then manifesting his opinion and articulating his evaluative tones, accommodating them to his tone, to his humor, to his irony, to his rejection, by using different discursive resources.

Even quoting the discourse of another person – in the form of direct speech – and using the verb “to say,” which at first might seem neutral, the tone given to the utterance shows that the author intends to refute the other person’s discourse. From the beginning of the utterance, the use of the verbal form “forgive me” (evaluative tone of modalization and of

irony) and the choice of the quoted fragment, besides the contextualization confirm that. This process becomes more evident when faced with the sense of opposition established through the argumentative operator “but”: *Forgive me*, reader Paulo Roberto, *but to say* “so that the dominant white class can begin to pay...”

Still replying to someone else’s discourse and manifesting his outrage, the author uses other argumentative strategies like interrogation and exclamation marks, when he resumes the other’s discourse and subjects it, in an implicit way, to a comparison. The other claims to be black; teacher/principal in a public school; he works in a rural area near a small town; he feels inserted in the “continuity of a race that, through the centuries,” has suffered a lot “getting nothing, absolutely nothing, in return”; asks for greater privileges – not just the quota system – “in relation to all social rights that exist in the country,” and wants that “the whites begin to pay their eternal debt to blacks.” The author identifies himself as being white, a student (“busting himself” to get into college); he was born in the countryside, has studied in a public school/has taken a course at night; has been working since he was 11 years old, wakes up at 5 in the morning, walks for more than thirty minutes (to save “cash”), arrives home at midnight. He believes that “social justice means equality without privileges to anybody.” Nevertheless, [taking into consideration the other’s discourse] he claims privileges “for having been born poor!”

The author makes lexical choices that are characteristic of a certain social group, like “guys,” “cash,” “bust myself” (slangs that refer to a person/individual; money/property; job/labor/work) and, at the same time, he uses elaborated expressions of the educated norm: “forgive me,” “disgusting,” “social justice means equality,” “reverse this chaotic situation,” as one can see through the use of italics in the transcribed letter.

In a way, this enunciative movement is configured as a social dialogized heteroglossia (BAKHTIN, 2008), that is, a language of a time, of a social group, of a generation, of a genre, of a tendency, which can be understood in the utterance as a contradictory and strained unity of two opposing tendencies of verbal life. In other words, this oscillation between dialogical tones – sometimes apparent objectivity and formality, sometimes subjectivity and informality – corroborates the direction of the discourse towards the evaluative tone and the irony of the author.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the words of Brait (1996), when she explains that whatever the dimension of the irony, a game is triggered between what the utterance says and what the utterance evokes, aiming at revealing or subverting values, and that this process

relies on the involvement of the reader, the listener or the spectator. She also explains that for there to be irony in an utterance – when an utterance is produced – the attention must be drawn not only to what is said, but also to the way it is being said, and that there must be a closer look at the existent contradictions between the two dimensions, since the irony is a quotation, that is, “the ironist calls upon other discourses in his utterance [...] with which he does not agree”<sup>6</sup> (BRAIT, 1996, p.106).

The sixth and last letter of the series bears the reader’s signature and email address. In the beginning of the text, the author establishes himself as the discursive subject by using the first person singular verb form “I am.” Then he uses the inclusive “we” with which he includes himself, all the other interlocutors and the inhabitants of the country.

*I am black and I have a major in public administration from a federal university and a master’s degree in political science. I know what I’ve been through to get here. So I really know that only through a policy of affirmative action will we be able to decrease the difference between whites and blacks (blacks and browns) that exist in this country. Many researches, including one done by Unesco, report that the income gap can’t be explained only by differences in education: even with equal levels of education, whites earn more money than blacks. C. A. S. G. eppaula@uol.com.br (the italics are ours).*

By beginning the letter saying he has a major in Public Administration and a master’s degree in Political Science, the author gives the discourse a tone of authority. This authority is reinforced by the concluding clause introduced by the connector “so,” accompanied by the verb “to know” and intensifying adverbs: “*So I really know that only through a policy of affirmative action will we be able to decrease the difference between whites and blacks (blacks and browns) that exist in this country*”.

This evaluative position gives the discourse a tone of decision, of “final word.” Like the other readers, the author of this letter addresses a superaddressee – “researches,” “UNESCO” – summoning the authority as a “decision-making power.” The utterance becomes more accentuated with the negation that precedes the verbal locution in “can’t be”: “*Many researches, including one done by Unesco, report that the income gap can’t be explained only by differences in education [...]*”.

The letter also carries an evaluative tone of moral resentment: “*I know what I’ve been through to get here,*” and of non-recognition: “[...] even with equal levels of education, *whites*”

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<sup>6</sup> Text in original: “o ironista convoca em seu enunciado outros discursos [...] com o qual ele não compartilha”.

*earn more money than blacks,*” depicting the discourse of the ancient exclusion of blacks in the Brazilian society.

All these letters lead to the reflection that, according to the theory of the Circle, in order to understand the historical evolution of the theme and of the meanings, it is essential to take *social evaluation* into consideration, because in the live utterance each element has, at the same time, a *meaning* and an *evaluation*. A new meaning is discovered in the old one and through the old one, but with the purpose of contradicting and rebuilding it. Thus, it can be said that “a change in meaning is, essentially, always a *reevaluation*: the transposition of some particular word from one evaluative context to another” (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.105) (The italics are the author’s).

In the context of these discourses on the quota system, we can mention the conflicts created around the notions of *race*, *miscegenation*, *inclusion*, *segregation* and the struggle of the evaluations around the concept of *discrimination* that, when used with the evaluation of speakers in favor of the quota policy, gains a meaning that differs from the meaning taken into consideration by speakers who are contrary to the quota system. To the ones in favor, the meaning of “discrimination” is that of “recognition” (to discriminate in order to create opportunities, compensate, repair, include); to the ones who are against it, the meaning of “discrimination” is that of “segregation” (to discriminate is to separate, to segregate, to perpetuate and emphasize differences).

## **Final considerations**

This article deals with the issue of the quota system in the printed media - magazine *Caros Amigos* – trying to show that the construction of discourse in relation to this affirmative policy is interwoven by voices that articulate themselves in strained and conflicting discursive interactions, which, aside from reflecting and refracting the controversy of the Brazilian identity, enables reflections about how the formation of discourses and of the interlocutors’ opinion about the inclusion/exclusion of blacks in the Brazilian society happen.

We have tried to expand the focus on the importance of the media’s action in relation to discursive practices, seeking to identify the way the voices manifest themselves in order to attribute meaning to the conflicts established between them. We also sought to highlight the main linguistic, enunciative and discursive mechanisms that are engendered in the construction of the discourses about the quota system.

The analyses indicate a very evident phenomenon in the unfolding of the controversy, that is, the author seems to always be aiming intensely at the discourse of the other to be able to establish dialogical relationships with it - assimilating it, reworking it and reaccentuating it according to his worldview, his value judgment and his emotions – and then deliver it toward the addressee, taking his possible reaction into consideration.

The analyses also suggest that the magazine *Caros Amigos* brings into play voices that come from different realms of the discursive communication, giving rise to discourses situated in a social, historical and cultural temporality: the ancient discourse about the exclusion of blacks in the Brazilian society, the discourses of genetics, of anthropology, of sociology on the concept of race and miscegenation, in short, about the construction of the Brazilian identity.

The results also show that the authors build their positioning in relation to the object of discourse, based on the value that the interlocutors attach to its construction; the controversy between the interlocutors determines the construction of the utterances; the dialogical analysis of the media's utterances contributes to a better understanding of the social nature of the discourse and of the relevant topics to society, as in the case of the quota system.

We have found that an analysis of the linguistic materiality based on the dialogical perspective of the discourse shows, more clearly, the controversial tone of the utterances in the syntactic constructions, in the serial or individual interrogation marks, in the lexical choices (adjectives, negations, adverbs, nominalizations), in the verbal forms, in the evaluative intonations, among others things.

Furthermore, this research shows that a study of the quota system, guided by the dialogical theory, identifies social voices that pervade the media's discourses, revealing the meanings that come from the tensions and clashes between the interlocutors. The room for discussions of different worldviews, in relation to this object of study, contributes to social changes, because it is in the clash of values, intonations and worldviews that subjects, discourses, identities and meanings are constructed.

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