"You are a clown, really" – The designation of a word and its functioning as an insult

"Você é um palhaço, mesmo" – A designação de uma palavra e seu funcionamento como insulto

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Abstract: This study, based on the theoretical assumptions of Semantics of the Event (GUIMARÃES, 2005, 2017, 2018) and Discourse Analysis (ORLANDI, 1983, 2007, 2013; PÊCHEUX, 2014, 2015), presents a reading about the discursive functioning of the word *clown* with pejorative meaning effect in the interlocution between one of the councilors and the mayor of Americana (SP), who had a heated quarrel during a public hearing in the City Hall. The role of interdiscursivity in the metaphorization of *clown* among diverse discursive formations is described and the designation of this word is analyzed from the transcript of the quarrel. These gestures allow us to understand how *clown* is rewritten by other forms integrated into the text, guiding the argumentation of the statement "You are a *clown,* really" to its interpretation as an insult.

Keywords: clown; insult; interdiscourse; memorable.

Resumo: Neste trabalho, a partir dos pressupostos teóricos da Semântica do Acontecimento (GUIMARÃES, 2005, 2017, 2018) e da Análise de Discurso (ORLANDI, 1983, 2007, 2013; PÊCHEUX, 2014, 2015), apresenta-se um gesto de leitura sobre o funcionamento discursivo da palavra *palhaço* produzindo efeito de sentido pejorativo na interlocução entre um dos vereadores e o prefeito de Americana (SP), que discutiram de modo acalorado durante uma audiência pública na Câmara Municipal. Descreve-se o papel da interdiscursividade na metaforização de *palhaço* entre diversificadas formações discursivas e se analisa a designação dessa palavra

tomando como material a transcrição da contenda entre os políticos. Esses gestos permitem compreender como a forma *palhaço* é reescriturada por outras integradas ao texto em questão, orientando a argumentação do enunciado "Você é um *palhaço*, mesmo" na direção de sua interpretação como insulto.

Palavras-chave: palhaço; insulto; interdiscurso; memorável.

1 Introduction

"What is and what is not *clown*" has been the theme of books, theatrical workshops, lectures, videos on social media, etc., promoting endless discussions. Several characters have emerged throughout history designated as *clowns* and, here and there, collaborated in the constitution of countless memories that are updated in discourses until today, inside and outside artistic contexts. Court fools, buffoons, arlequins, *hotxuás*, heyokas, satyrs, lubyets, pierrots, mimes, white clowns, augustes, tramps... the list is endless. All these denominations – corresponding to comic performative practices more or less similar among one another – make up the semantic thickness of *clown*, along with the many others that appear daily. If inside clownery[1] there are already disputes about the meaning of *clown*, outside of it, the disputes remain. It is hard to reach an agreement.

In everyday speech, who defines what *clown* is? If someone is called a "clown," in what sense are they *a clown*? What determines the meaning of *clown* outside of clownery (in the case presented in this paper, that of an insult)? Bréal (1883, p. 133), in a critique of a purely etymological treatment of words, stresses the difficulty of isolating a word "and tracing its history, as if it had not been coerced, enhanced, slightly nuanced or completely transformed by the other words of

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[1] "A clown dramaturgy that concerns his show and the particular characteristics of his acting form," according to Reis (2013, p. 21).

vocabulary, in the midst of which it is placed and from which it receives near or distant influence." Taking this criticism seriously, let us look at how much *clown* has "suffered" – and suffers – as a word, how *clown* is a "suffered" word.

On one hand, it is used to designate the circus artist whose scenic practices provoke laughter (among other reactions); it is also constitutive of several discourses whose meanings are not exactly comical: some clown figures have melancholy and poetry as mottos of their performance in public squares or theaters; others gained notoriety with perversion and crime in film productions, for example; so many others establish some moments of poetry in spaces of pain and social conflict, such as hospitals and war zones. Many subjects play clowns (interpreting themselves as clowns) differently, producing the most distinct *clown* meanings.

On the other hand, *clown* has been suffering, as a word, symbolic slaps, cheats and betrayals. In our social formation, *clown* is recurrently present in the space of political disputes, to name only a few examples, sometimes it designates that subject who was ridiculed, deceived, "made of fool," or someone that deserves no respect – for their conduct, for being an "unserious person who behaves in a ridiculous way and with little dignity."[2] If someone makes an improper overtaking in traffic, someone else may yell "hey, *clown*, where did you buy your license?" If a boss says something considered inappropriate by the employees in a business context: "How can this *clown* say those barbarities in a board meeting?"

According to Bréal (1883), it could be understood that these *clown* uses inside and outside artistic practice defined the meaning of clown throughout a "history of enunciations" in which *clown* gains certain layers of specific colors – and not others.

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[2] This is the definition of *clown* in the online dictionary Houaiss (available at: http://houaiss.uol.com.br/pub/apps/www/v3-3/html/index.php#1). We also find other definitions of this word that are important to understand the object of this study: "easily deceived person" (Michaelis); "person who says and does funny things: *He was the class clown*" (Aulete). Respectively, available at: http://michaelis.uol.com.br/moderno-portugues/busca/portugues-brasileiro/palha%C3%A7o/; http://www.aulete.com.br/palha%C3%A7o. Accessed on: 2nd oct. 2019

2 The enunciation of *clown* as an insult

In order to analyze and understand how *clown* produces insulting effects, I propose a productive dialogue, without disregarding their constitutive differences, between two disciplines of language studies that deal with the processes of enunciation and signification: Discourse Analysis (ORLANDI, 1983, 2007, 2013; PÊCHEUX, 2014, 2015) and Semantics of the Event (GUIMARÃES, 2005, 2017, 2018). The nodal point that will serve me as a perspective is the focus of these disciplines on the functioning of memory in the production of meanings, the *interdiscourse*: "the discursive knowledge that makes it possible to say everything and that returns in the form of the pre-constructed [meaning], the already said that is the basis of the sayable, supporting each take on the word" (ORLANDI, 2013, p. 31).

With Pêcheux (2015, p. 158), I point out that, initially, there is not a semic structure of the *clown* object and, later, that there are "varied applications of this structure in different situations, but that the discursive reference of the object is already constructed in discursive formations[3] (technical, moral, political...) combining its effects with the interdiscourse effects." Therefore, there is no "artistic naturalness" of *clown* that would make it the object of insulting metaphors, political denunciations, literary creations etc. For the author, the discursive production of objects[4] – such as clown – circulate through these different discursive formations without considering their origin. He says:

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[3] For the author, discursive formation would be "what, in a given conjuncture, determined by the state of class struggle, determines *what can and should be said* (articulated in the form of a speech, a sermon, a pamphlet, an exhibition, a program, etc.). This is equivalent to affirming that words, expressions, propositions, etc., receive their meaning from the discursive formation in which they are produced; applying the terms we have introduced above to the specific point of the materiality of discourse and meaning, we can say that individuals are 'interpellated' as subjects-speakers (subjects of their discourse) by the discursive formations that represent 'in language' the correspondent ideological formations" (PÊCHEUX, 2014, p. 147, emphasis added).
[4] In his text, the author uses as examples the objects "mole," "free balloon" and "railway," refuting a "zoological" nature to the first and a "technical" to the following.

> The interdiscourse, far from being an integrative effect of discursivity, has since become its principle of functioning: it is because the elements of the textual sequence, functioning in a given discursive formation, can be imported (metaphorized) from a sequence belonging to another discursive formation that discursive references can be constructed and displaced historically (PÊCHEUX, 2015, p. 158).

Understanding this functioning allows us to observe how symbolically rich the clown object is, metaphorizing itself among diverse discursive formations and producing multiple meanings – many of which are sources of endless polemics. The materials in which *clown* is textualized are not rare, putting us before its broad equivocity, that is, its ability to mean so many varied things in the most diverse social and discursive formations, according to various identification processes. On a daily basis, we come across posters of musical shows and plays, comic strips, memes, cartoons, movies, music videos, masks in protests, etc., in which the *clown* object is present with different meanings.[5]

Guimarães (2017), who is concerned with the processes of/ in the event of enunciation, suggests that the memory of meanings – *interdiscourse* – should not be mistaken with the past in the event – *the memorable.* For him, the memorable is the way a history of enunciations temporalizes itself in the event of enunciation, which merges statements of different discourses in a text. The interdiscourse, according to the author, would be this intersection. "Enunciation, then, is a place of subject positions that are the links of the event with interdiscursivity. Thus, what is meant, the meaning effects, are the interdiscourse effects on the event" (GUIMARÃES, 2005, p. 68).

Still according to the author, "the meaning is not the effect of the enunciative circumstance, nor is it just memory. The meaning is the effects of the memory and the present of the event: subject positions, intersection of discourses" (GUIMARÃES, 2005, p. 70). When an individual occupies a subject position in the event (from the place where one speaks: wife, driver, mayor, student, grandmother, etc.), the language functions because it is affected by interdiscourse. From the Semantics of

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[5] Check out analysis of some of these materials at: Osthues (2019); Benayon, Osthues and Lagazzi (2019); Anjos and Osthues (2020).

the Event point of view, for the word *clown* to mean and produce effects of insult – and not of description, for example – a past is necessary to make it mean as such. "The past is, in the event [of enunciation], a recollection of enunciations," says the author (GUIMARÃES, 2017, p. 17). There is, according to him, a "future latency" that projects meaning in the event through a memorable past.

From this angle, it is important to emphasize that there is a subtle difference in the way Discourse Analysis and Semantics of the Event[6] approach the notion of *interdiscourse,* the memory of meanings (STEIGENBERGER; MACHADO; SCHREIBER DA SILVA, 2011). For the first, interdiscourse would be what provides an update – the meaning is produced when a *past is brought to the present.* For Semantics of the Event, with the notion of memorable, *there is a past within the present,* guiding the enunciation (the argumentation) to the future (of other enunciations). "It is not a discursive 'before'. It is the past thought in an enunciative manner, according to the time of the event. [...] The memory that was cut out is the object of interest and not the network of enunciations of a past" (SCHREIBER DA SILVA, 2012, p. 4).

In detail, note that, in the event of a statement such as "Hey, *clown*, where did you buy your license?", produced in a situation of exaltation in traffic and addressed to an interlocutor who drives a vehicle irresponsibly, *clown* cuts out a memorable of *mess*, *disorder*, *confusion*. Other situations, although differently configured (at school, at home, in a relationship of a couple, in a football team, etc.), serve as a setting for enunciations in which *clown* cuts out a similar memorable.

Now, if we turn to the hypothetical situation of an employee who considers his boss' speech inappropriate for a meeting with a business board, we will see that the memorable which was cut out is another. In "How can this *clown* say those barbarities in a board meeting?", the memorable is that certain people say *unfruitful, foolish, unpolite* things. It is not the same as the one cut out in the previous example.

Discursively, taking into account the metaphorization of an object in the most diverse discursive formations, we consider that the memory of meanings is what allows *clown* to mean multiple things in

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[6] What I call Semantics of the Event is named "Historical Semantics of Enunciation" by Steigenberger, Machado and Schreiber da Silva (2011).

different discourses from countless subject positions. This way, the *clown* meanings in circulation are constituted by discourses *of* clownery as an artistic practice (the effect of the pre-constructed meaning of a comic character who deceives someone else in a circus ring, slaps and kicks him; who stutters, missays words, fires profanities, etc.), along with discourses *about* clownery (such as insulting statements, protest, denunciation, etc.).

Having put the relations of similarity and dissimilarity between the two theories that support this article, let us turn to the episode that will take our attention from now on and the material with which we will produce our reading.

3 A *clown* designation

In Americana, a city in the countryside of São Paulo, Councilor Gualter Amado (PRB) was never a circus artist, did not star in horror films, nor was protesting in the streets with a red nose in the middle of his face. Despite this, according to Mayor Omar Najar (MDB), he "is a *clown*, really." During a public hearing at the City Council on February 27th, 2019,[7] for the discussion on the fiscal targets of the third quarter of 2018, amid a quarrel between the two politicians, Gualter was called a "clown," "idiot," "silly," reputed for "acting as a clown" and "talking a lot of nonsense."

The public hearing was ending when the mayor, whose presence was not expected in that session, was quoted by the councilor, who asked him to explain his management actions regarding public accounts. Omar Najar, then, having space granted to speak, begins to refer to the councilor and his questions in an exalted way. The debate takes place according to the following transcript:[8]

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[7] The quarrel circulates on the internet (news portals, blogs and social media) through short videos edited from a live broadcast of TV Câmara de Americana. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IEK_pw9jFs. Accessed on: 2nd oct. 2019

[8] This transcript refers to the excerpt from the video that begins at 1:37:00 and ends at 1:42:52, when the microphones of Gualter Amado and Omar Najar are turned off. Bold and italics are my highlights. There was no correction of the statements of the politicians involved in the quarrel. Hesitations are represented by suspension points and the passages I could not transcribe were replaced by [unintelligible]. When the statements of the politicians cross, I represent the interruptions with //.

[Omar Najar] It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for the words that... But I couldn't help come here because I don't know if people don't want to understand or want to do demagoguery. This story that I fired a doctor, I didn't fire any doctor. The doctor quit because he was forced to clock in. They received 10, 12 thousand reais per month there from the City Hall. That's what the councilor should say, not **this nonsense**. This story... "fired 150 doctors"... I didn't fire any. Every doctor left there because, by law, they had to clock in. Now, if I hire a company to provide health services, I can't. I'll have to run after doctors. Another thing... you talk about the DAE money. The DAE money, we took the money because of the situation City Hall was in. We took 20 and it had... 29 were left in the cash flow. So, we did not spend all the money from any DAE. Enough with this **clowning**. Go find out the truth. We don't cover up anything like the other governments did and did not give information to the City Council, and made this mess that they made in Americana. It's hard to put up with this **clowning**. "The mayor is guilty of everything." And you, councilor, are guilty of what? That they gave 70 million to that other mayor. That's the commitment with Americana. Not **chasing each other's tale**, **pissing other people off**. The mayor's office is open to any city councilor to get it anytime they want. Now, **ruining things**, **doing nonsense**, **wanting to appear on television**? Go to hell! **This is not decent**. Enough, dammit! Let's work together with Americana or bury it at once. You think it's easy to live everyday with a knife at your neck, that the... the... the Audit Office wants... The... the councilor didn't say... Today, the law says that I have to leave 3.65 of the budget, I have to pay the mandatory warrant. This represents 35 million reais of the Tebaldi government, of the Frederico government, of the Carrol Meneghel government, of the government of all those who passed there. See if the...the...the...the government of Omar Najar has a mandatory warrant. I didn't do any mandatory warrant. Now, the mandatory warrant that the other mayor left here is gonna be charged, which only exists because he didn't pay a bunch of suppliers. Got it... the City Council gave a blank check for the other mayor of 70 million reais and he proposed in this chamber that he was going to pay the mandatory warrant,

but he didn't pay a mandatory warrant. The money that arrived in this City Hall it is for daycares and other...ah...sectors of the city was embezzled and I am being forced to return it under penalty of not receiving the participation fund anymore. Go administrate to see if it's easy day and night. I never went through this in my life. And I still have to put up with this insult? That's not how it works. Good judgment is good judgement. Now, making this mess, for me, it doesn't work. Insisting all the time "ehhh... 20 million from DAE." The money is from the City Hall! While the other laundered money, did what he wanted, no one stood up. You were a citizen of Americana. Why didn't you stand up, didn't go to the public prosecution? You can answer anytime you want because **you're acting like a clown**! **You're a clown, really!** You can answer, I'm here to listen to your conversation.

[Gualter Amado] Well... first, you have to be more polite.

[Omar Najar] I won't be polite to you.

[Gualter Amado] Here, you have to be polite to speak here.

[Omar Najar] You go to hell!

[Gualter Amado] We're not at your mom's house.

[Omar Najar] It's the house of... your mom, **idiot**!

[Gualter Amado] We're not at your mom's house. You can't come here and insult councilor//

[Omar Najar] I do what I want here!

[Gualter Amado] // the way that you're doing.

[Omar Najar] Silly!

[Gualter Amado] You impolite!

[Omar Najar] Silly!

[Gualter Amado] Impolite! Who do you think you are here?

[Omar Najar] You think whatever you want!

[Gualter Amado] Who do you think you are? We're discussing money here, money//

[Omar Najar] Discussing? Is this a matter to discuss here?

[Gualter Amado] // public money! Here, we're discussing public money!

[Omar Najar] Idiot! This here is no matter of discussion.

[Gualter Amado] Yes, it is.

[Omar Najar] No, it's not!

[Gualter Amado] It's part of...

[Omar Najar] We came to present the [unintelligible] here.

[Gualter Amado] It's part of the budget of this town.

[Omar Najar] You started a conversation that has nothing to do//

[Gualter Amado] Yes, it does.

[Omar Najar] // with this hearing. This hearing is nonsense.

[Gualter Amado] It has a lot to do with it. This hearing is to discuss fiscal targets.

[Omar Najar] No, it's not related! Fiscal target is one thing!

[Gualter Amado] Yes, it's related! Here, look!

[Omar Najar] Don't start mentioning DAE. You came here to **say a lot of nonsense**!

[Gualter Amado] I say what I want here.

[Omar Najar] I also say what I want here! I am the mayor!

[Gualter Amado] But you can't disrespect people. You, as a mayor, as a public figure, you can't come here and disrespect councilors.

[Omar Najar] I am not disrespecting! I am disrespecting an idiot like you.

[Gualter Amado] You called me "*clown.*" You told me to go to hell.

[Omar Najar] You're an **idiot**!

[Gualter Amado] You're calling me an idiot.

[Omar Najar] You don't know how to do Math, boy!

[Gualter Amado] Ah! "I don't know how to do Math?" Ha!

[Omar Najar] You say what you want to say!

[Gualter Amado] We're not at your mom's house.

[Omar Najar] Go, mom! Let's go, mom! Say what you want to say!

[Gualter Amado] This is not your firm!

[Omar Najar] Say what you want to say!

[Gualter Amado] Here, we have to prove where the money comes from.

[Omar Najar] Go prove! Go look! You have all the right to look. You don't have to keep **making a scene**!

[Gualter Amado] I'm not... you're the one who's making a scene!

[Omar Najar] It's you, **idiot**!

[Gualter Amado] What are you doing here, then? [...]

For a necessary delimitation, I stick to the analysis of the transcribed material for the purpose of describing the semantic-linguistic functioning from specific notions of Semantics of the Event, turning my gaze, precisely, to the use of *clown* as an insult. In other studies, one can consider, the same way I consider language, the other aspects of the composition, such as the video.[9]

I understand how *clown* functions in the material considering the fundamental notions of *designation* and *rewriting*. Departing from the statement "You are a clown, really" to the understanding of its meaning and the meaning of *clown* (designation) as the word is integrated into it. "A word or an expression mean something because they are integrated into a statement, which only is a statement because it is integrated into a text" (GUIMARÃES, 2018, p. 151). This means that any element of a statement refers to something when it is related with that statement. And this element has a meaning precisely because this relationship conveys a meaning to the element. This meaning is what, together with Guimarães (2018, p. 152), I will call "designation of a word."

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[9] One observation: although I used the transcript of the quarrel between the mayor and the councilor to carry out the analysis, it is not possible, of course, to desconsider the sonority (orality of the language in its enunciation, the prosodic elements etc.) and visual aspects (the startled corporeal gestures of the subjects in the quarrel, the visual formulation of the framing by the cameraman etc.) of the material, which compose the video published by TV Câmara de Americana.

Thus, it is necessary to observe how the designation of *clown* functions in the discourse based on its integration into the text above. "That is, there is no way to consider that a form [*clown*] functions in a statement without considering that it functions in a text and to what extent it constitutes the meaning of the text" (GUIMARÃES, 2017, p. 9). And in the statement, as a unit of analysis for its articulation in the text, it is necessary to understand the discursive process from which this text is made, its constitutive piece. According to Orlandi (2013, p. 70), it is neither a starting point nor an arrival point: "Understanding how a text functions, how it produces meanings, is to understand it as a linguistic-historical object; it is to explain how it performs the discursivity that constitutes it."

The bold applied to certain expressions and words in the transcript highlights other forms related to "You are a *clown,* really," producing the statement meaning (mainly of the word *clown*). So, we can observe how the clown form refers to other words, integrated into the statement "You are a clown, really," which, in turn, is integrated into the text. Under an "appearance of substitutability" (GUIMARÃES, 2017, p. 36), the forms "talking nonsense"; "clowning"; "chasing each other's tale"; "pissing other people off"; "ruining things"; [keep] "doing nonsense"; "wanting to appear on television"; "this is not decent"; "you're acting like a clown"; "idiot"; "silly"; "talking a lot of nonsense"; "making a scene" relate to *clown* by textuality. "The sets of referring modes organized around a name are a way to determine it, to predict it. And in this sense, they constitute the designation of the name in question" (GUIMARÃES, 2017, p. 36).

The process of rewriting takes place when the enunciation of a text incessantly resays what has already been said. "By rewriting, by interpreting something differently from what it is, this procedure attributes (predicates) something to the word" (GUIMARÃES, 2018, p. 38), it attributes what the word itself cuts out as past, as memorable. Throughout the mayor's intervention, a *clown* argument is constructed, guiding its interpretation as an insult. When referring to certain gestures of the councilor as "clowning", he begins a significant chain that guides the argumentation, especially by the determination of *clowning*, which determines the meaning of *clown*, whose effect on the councilor is of an

attack – see his increasing rage throughout the speech (to do so, watch the video).[10]

The event of "clowning" cuts out the memorable of an act of clowns or the effects of that act. In artistic practice, a sketch acted by a clown is *clowning*; just as a joke and a cunning plot to cheat the scene partner are *also clowning*, as well as the exhibitionism, the mockery, the provocation, the harassment of the audience, etc. For the mayor to designate the gestures of the councilor as clowning – "you're acting like a clown" – some rewritings occur.

By substitution, we can say that the following expressions rewrite "acting like a clown." Substitution rewriting produces a relation of synonymy, which does not mean an equal meaning, but an assignment of meaning (a semantic determination) from one expression to another:

talking nonsense > chasing each other's tail > pissing other people off > ruining things > doing nonsense > wanting to appear on television > making a scene > talking a lot of nonsense...

... is acting like a clown.

And what is not "acting like a clown?" "This is not decent." Anaphorically, "This" rewrites "acting like a clown," already rewritten by the other expressions that replace it, predicate it in the text. If clowning implies all the other acts attributed semantically to what it refers to, we have that "clowning is not decent." To say that someone is decent cuts out the memorable that some deserve more respect than others and are worthy of honor for acting with virtues such as discretion, honesty and integrity. Acting like a clown (wanting to show off, talking nonsense, pissing people off, etc.) wouldn't be a gesture of decency. And if the councilor acts like a clown, he is *a clown, he is not decent.* Thus, *clown* is pejoratively predicated, designating the councilor (also in a rude way). Follow:

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[10] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IEK_pw9jFs. Accessed on: 2nd oct. 2019

"This" [clowning [showing off, molesting, etc.]] "(it)'s not decent"

clowning is what clowns do

clowns are not decent

"you [the councilor]'re acting like a clown"

You are not acting decent

You're not decent

"You're a clown, really**"**

Already predicated in a pejorative way, determined semantically by clown not being "decent," the clown designation attributed to the councilor – also predicated by the reinforcing argumentative operator "really" – continues to be determined throughout the enunciation: by substitution, "silly" and "idiot" (often repeated) rewrite and attribute meanings to *clown,* cutting out the memorable of foolishness, silliness and ignorance.

Interdiscursively, I point out that "silly" and "idiot" are present in the most diverse discourses and produce, with certain regularity, pejorative effects as well. It is not "by chance" that they occur as rewritings of *clown* in the integration of the text in question. Another interdiscursive perspective may be that certain clown practices bet on narratives in which the characters maintain an "auguste" stance.

> There is a distortion that dominates the reception of clownery. The classic tradition of relationship between pairs of clowns in which the *so-called* Auguste assumes sillier, more naive and clumsier posture is opposed to that identified as the white clown, which has a more elegant posture, allegedly intelligent and authoritarian, both in its relationship with Auguste and with the audience. Today, people, both artists and spectators, have a notion that associates every clown with the image of Auguste (REIS, 2013, p. 28, emphasis added).
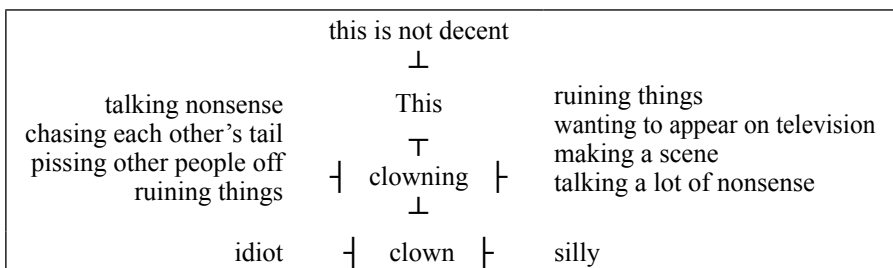
Although this mode of acting is quite fluid for certain clowns (from the condition of Auguste's subordinate position, a clown may well "turn the tables" and become the white clown), as Reis points out, the dominant discourses designate clowns as Augustes. And the Augustes are regularly silly, idiots (or treated as if they were) on stage. In other

words, "in all saying there is always something that remains, that is, the sayable, the memory. The paraphrase thus represents the return to the same spaces of saying. Different formulations of the same consolidated saying are produced" (ORLANDI, 2013, p. 36). The way "idiot" and "silly" designate *clown* – that designates councilor Gualter Amado – can be observed in these paraphrases:

<div align="center">

the clown is an idiot

the clown is silly

"You're a clown, really**"**

You're an idiot, really

You're silly, really

</div>

For a schematic illustration of how clowning rewritings articulate with clown and thus determine its meanings, see the diagram of its Semantic Domain of Determination (SDD). It encompasses the relationships of the attribution of meanings among words of a text that is yet to be analyzed. For this purpose, specific symbols are used. The signs ⊤, ⊥, ⊢, ⊣ represent that a word/expression determines another word/expression in the pointed direction. For example: *idiot* ⊣ clown (*idiot determines clown* or *clown is determined by idiot*).

<div align="center">

SDD – *clown*

</div>

	this is not decent ⊥	
talking nonsense chasing each other's tail pissing other people off ruining things	This ⊤ ⊣ clowning ⊢ ⊥	ruining things wanting to appear on television making a scene talking a lot of nonsense
idiot	⊣ clown ⊢	silly

4 Sustaining an insult that is open to misunderstanding

Argumentation is a relationship of language that, to be interpreted, requires remission to interdiscourse as a memory of the event of enunciation. And if a subject position delimits a region of interdiscourse,

it also decides this "argument." It's as a mayor ("I also say what I want! I'm the mayor!") that Omar Najar designates Gualter Amado as *clown.* And this argument – Gualter Amado is a *clown* – is not a reference to a fact, it functions in and through language. According to Guimarães (2005, p. 78), "an argument is not something that indicates a fact that is capable of leading to a conclusion. An argument is a statement that, being said, by its meaning, leads to a conclusion (another meaning)."

Arguing is to guide a saying: the orientation of the *clown* form in the text in which it appears produces the pejorative effect, interpreted as insult. The subject, when calling another a *clown,* is describing a conduct, pointing out a way the other behaves. Thus, we describe a way of identifying the other as repulsive / condemnable / reprehensible, etc.: what the other does is not taken seriously, it is the effect of a vile performance *(clowning* > clown act), in which the performer is intolerable (*clown* > idiot, silly). Kristeva describes with admirable refinement how an abjection can drive the subject mad:

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful – a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 1).[11]

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[11] "Il y a, dans l'abjection, une de ces violentes et obscures révoltes de l'être contre ce qui le menace et qui lui paraît venir d'un dehors ou d'un dedans exorbitant, jeté à côté du possible, du tolérable, du pensable. C'est là, tout près more inassimilable. Ça sollicite, inquiète, fascine le désir qui pourtant ne se laisse pas séduire. Apeuré, il se détourne. Ecœuré, il rejette. Un absolu le protége de l'opprobre, il en est fier, il y tient. Mais en même temps, quand même, cet élan, ce spasme, ce saut, est attiré vers un ailleurs aussi tentant que condamné. Inlassablement, comme un boomerang

Of what is the subject ("beside himself") capable when haunted by abjection? Insulting. Discursively, the argument is mobilized by the gesture of interpretation, which can be perceptible or not to the subject or interlocutors – the one who uses clown as an insult, the one that is affected by it – more precisely, by its meaning in given conditions (the subjects, the circumstance of enunciation, the socio-historical and ideological context) and by the way this form appears in the enunciation, determined by other forms of the text into which it is integrated. The insulting orientation, the direction of the meanings with pejorative effects, is decided by this gesture, which decides, after all, the direction of the subject (ORLANDI, 2007, p. 22).

According to Barbai (2018, p. 667, emphasis added), the insult is a "privileged *locus* to think about the responsibility with the meanings, the effects of its act in the city." The quarrel between Omar Najar and Gualter Amado illustrates the difference, the confrontation and the conflict operating in certain discursive practices. He adds: "if there is the possibility of two 'mes', it is in the sense that there is conflict in the constitution of the subjects."

In this direction, reflecting on the equivocity of *clown* is also reflecting on *what is not said* when *clown* is an insult. What other linguistic object does *clown* replace? What other insults that Omar Najar could find to ofend Gualter Amado that *clown* is not able to metaphorize? Barbai explains:

> deprecating is to deny the other **the place** he/she occupies in the world. The presence of the other is not denied here. He/she is there and that is why he/se shows up under the force of injury. Thus, the act, the intention to reject someone or something is present in the discourse. It's the reject, the residue that you want to throw away and exterminate that appears. Disgust, an unspeakable object, is what materializes in words there: you are trash, human trash. You spit your tongue in the other's face. There is a swear word, an ironic word, which instead of killing (the word kills the thing, Lacan said), it discards (BARBAI, 2018, p. 674, emphasis added).

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indomptable, un pôle d'appel et de répulsion met celui qui en est habité littéralement hors de lui" (KRISTEVA, 1980, p. 9).

Considering Barbai's formulation, could we say that "you're human trash" metaphorizes "you're *a clown,* really?" The exchange of accusations, with exalted spirits in front of an audience that was probably torn between rejoicing and embarrassment, looked like a rummage through a landfill, a trash-talk.

> I start from the idea that an insult is a violent articulation of the verb. In its heart, in this act, there is the release of an unpronounceable thing, towards someone. An insult strikes identities, history, a people. An insult is a word that should not be said aloud, that is, profanity, language prohibitions, irony and laughter practiced in the social bond, in the city. The insult is, therefore, a rubbish of a word, a disgusting word, an abject of language and technologies, which is thrown at the other (BARBAI, 2019, s/p).

5 Final considerations

It was as an insult that the designation *of clown* – which happens in the quarrel between the mayor and councilor from Americana – was understood. We follow the insulting functioning of this signifier that materializes, in the event of an enunciation (in a heated quarrel), an abjection to the other. Therefore, the analyzed material was the transcript of an excerpt from the public hearing in which the dispute took place. From it, we described the rewriting process of clown within the analyzed text, which determines the meanings of this word, produces pejorative effects and guides the interpretation of the statement "You are a *clown*, really" as an insult.

Still encouraged by the way Barbai understands the insult, I affirm that the meaning of *clown* (constituted from an abjection of one for another – of the mayor for the councilor of Americana) makes its form a symbolic object that is put against the other to offend, in and through language. The enunciation of *clown* and the rewrites that determine it would cause damage to the reputation of Councilor Gualter Amado in those conditions of production, through "a disgusting word" (BARBAI, 2019) delivered by Mayor Omar Najar.

These are possible reflections in view of the understanding of the broad equivocity of *clown* as a symbolic object, considering that its inscription in given discursive formations allows this nuance (BRÉAL,

1883). That is, it allows *clown* to be used by subjects in different ways, producing the pejorative effects as an insult, as it has been shown in this study. We have seen how interdiscursivity is the premise so that this symbolic object can have different meanings in varied discourses, whether in artistic practices or not.

For the author, the imprecation, even having meaning, would be "only expressive" (therefore, "non-communicative," directed to another subject). The insult, on the contrary, does not "escape" – like a naughty dog, by simple carelessness of its owner. The insult – a trained dog – *is released* to attack. When the insult comes out of the kennel, no muzzle can prevent the damage.

Acknowledgements

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