



Verbal and Moral Tug of War: a study of the use of categories as offense in the virtual environment

Cabo de Guerra Verbal e Moral: um estudo do uso de categorias como ofensa no ambiente virtual

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Abstract: An issue that has been highlighted in print and social media are the so-called “new swear words,” that is, the use of identity categories of an ideological and political nature as forms of insults. In this work, we contemplate the phenomenon of categorization and its relationship with sequentality and morality, in the process of reframing these categories. In the light of an approach that integrates studies on membership categorization (SACKS, 1995) with studies on conversation organization (SACKS; SCHEGLOFF; JEFFERSON, 1974), we analyzed reports from a digital newspaper, hosted on YouTube, about police actions in the state of Rio de Janeiro, and

the comments that the stories elicits from channel users. The objective of the article is to investigate how the participants (channel and users) orient themselves, in their posts, to the categorization work when displaying and negotiating their understandings of what is being said/done turn by turn. The results reveal that the controversial nature of the topic and some of the tool's affordances (HUTCHBY, 2001) work as devices for the construction of a verbal and moral tug of war between those who affiliate and those who do not affiliate with the newspaper's position. The results also point to the influence of the channel's design of the initial post format for the reaffirmation of the ideological and political positions of the members on each side, which has an impact on the hostile environment observed in parallel conversations between users. Given the polarized environment, the participants redefine categories attributed to the other, linking them to morally disapproved predicates.

Keywords: YouTube; membership categorization; conversation organization; morality; polarization; police practice.

Resumo: Uma questão que vem sendo destacada na mídia impressa e nas mídias sociais são os chamados “novos palavrões”, isto é, o uso de categorias identitárias de natureza ideológica e política como formas de xingamento. Neste trabalho, contemplamos o fenômeno da categorização e sua relação com a sequencialidade e a moralidade, no processo de ressignificação dessas categorias. À luz de uma abordagem que integra os estudos sobre categorização de pertença (SACKS, 1995) aos estudos da organização da conversa (SACKS; SCHEGLOFF; JEFFERSON, 1974), analisamos reportagens sobre ações policiais no Rio de Janeiro, publicadas em um jornal digital, hospedado no YouTube, e os comentários produzidos pelos usuários sobre essas matérias. O objetivo do artigo é o de investigar como os participantes (Jornal e usuários) se orientam, em suas postagens, para o trabalho de categorização ao exibirem e negociarem seus entendimentos do que está sendo dito/feito turno a turno. Os resultados revelam que a natureza controversa do tema e algumas das possibilidades (HUTCHBY, 2001) da ferramenta funcionam como dispositivos para a construção de um cabo de guerra verbal e moral entre os que se afiliam e os que se desafiliam à posição do Jornal. Os resultados apontam também para a influência do design do formato da postagem inicial do canal para a reafirmação das posições ideológicas e políticas dos membros de cada lado, o que repercute no ambiente de hostilidade observado nas conversas paralelas entre os usuários. Dado o ambiente polarizado, os participantes ressignificam categorias atribuídas ao outro, vinculando-as a predicados moralmente desaprovados.

Palavras-chave: *youTube*; categorização de pertença; organização da conversa; moralidade; polarização; prática policial.

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1 Introduction

Verbal violence was once considered a transitional landmark between barbarism and civilization. According to Freud (2017), the civilizing process begins when the human being resorts to a swear word, and not physical violence, to attack the “enemy”. However, the explosion of this type of violence, in the so-called “Age of Incivility” (PHILLIPS; STUART, 2018), has put the very notion of civilization under suspicion. There are many contexts of conflict in which, for different reasons, the principle of preserving face is suspended, which, according to Goffman (1967), is a condition for building a pleasant and peaceful coexistence between individuals in society.

In Brazil, one of the contexts of conflict that led to polarization and, consequently, to the growth of verbal violence was that of the 2014 and 2018 presidential elections. Each of these events contributed to divide the country between the extremes of the political spectrum. The dispute between parties considered to be right-wing and those considered to be left-wing fueled the war between “We” and “They”. The climate of hostility, resulting from intolerance to the diversity of beliefs and values, stimulated verbal violence in both the public and private spheres.

One of the environments that proved to be conducive to the proliferation of offenses was the virtual one. According to Zizek (2008), the Internet has made it possible for individuals to be super close. Because of that, internal worlds, protected in the offline environment, started to be shared in the online world, disintegrating civilization’s symbolic wall of protection. Research on heated discussions on social networks has also pointed out the influence that the topics debated, the technical layout and users’ perspective have on the way people use them (HOUSLEY *et al.*, 2002; LIN; TIAN, 2018; TAGG *et al.*, 2017).

Studies on hostile or rude behavior in the offline world have been examined in the light of politeness theory, especially based on the Brown and Levinson (1987) model, as illustrated by Culpeper’s (1996) pioneering work on impoliteness strategies. The same occurs in studies that contemplate this type of behavior in the virtual environment. According to Xie (2018), research on impolite behavior has been done through revisits and reviews of the so-called classic and postmodern models on politeness (XIE, 2018). Recent studies such as those by Arendholz (2013), Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010), Hardaker, (2010) and Balocco and Shepherd (2017) illustrate this trend.

Here we are proposing another direction. The fact that ideological and political categories have been treated in the media as the “new swear words,”¹ that is, as insults, sparked our interest in examining how descriptions of people, collectivities and events lead to inference of categories and how the categorization work is used to offend in posts published on the channel *A Nova Democracia – AND (The New Democracy)*. The decision to analyze this specific channel was due, firstly, to the theme. The chosen channel has a section dedicated to video sharing, in which the records of police action in communities and events stand out. Police practice has been the object of study in research developed since 2015 by members of the research group *Discurso, Interação e Prática Profissional (DIPP) (Discourse, Interaction and Professional Practices)*, of which the authors are part. Another member of the group focused on police-citizen encounters recorded by residents of one of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas and how they use their cell phones to denounce police action in their communities (DINUCCI, 2018).

The analytical approach proposed here considers the phenomenon of categorization and its relationship with sequentiality and morality. The data are part of a larger corpus, collected by Oliveira (2016), for her doctoral thesis (in progress), about epistemic battles, in the comments section of the same channel. To maintain confidentiality, the print screen feature has not been used,² and users’ avatars (images used in the profile) and names (and pseudonyms) have also been modified. The data transcripts were faithful to the users’ original text.³

In this work we propose to examine how the participants orient themselves towards the categorization work, when displaying and

¹ Some examples of references (in Brazilian Portuguese) regarding the use of the term “new swear words” in the media: Available at: <https://www.brasil247.com/midia/sakamoto-comunista-virou-um-xingamento-vazio-chegara-a-vez-de-democracia> Accessed on: 27 jun. 2020; Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/miguellucena.net/videos/660585398080872/> Accessed on: 27 jun. 2020; Available at: <https://rbispo77.jusbrasil.com.br/artigos/626165668/chamar-uma-pessoa-de-fascista-ou-comunista-e-crime> Accessed on: 27 jun. 2020.

² The print screen is a common key on computer keyboards. When the key is pressed, it captures in image everything that is present on the screen and copies it to the clipboard.

³ As the material posted may at any time be unavailable for public access through the channel, we are preserving a backup copy of the content of the posts for a minimum period of 5 (five) years under the care of the authors of this article.

negotiating their understandings of what is being said turn by turn,⁴ and how the predicates associated with the categories invoked can be used methodically in carrying out offensive actions.

In the next section we discuss the concept of Membership Categorization and its relationship with the interactional organization of talk-in-interaction, as well as the challenges posed by our type of data. Then, we talk about how the speeches about police action and human rights, as well as the technical design of the channel with its comment system contribute to the categorization processes that act in the construction of the verbal and moral tug of war in the virtual environment. In the sections that follow we analyze several excerpts, describing the categorization practices used by the digital Newspaper and commentators.

2 Theoretical-methodological approach

Using observation as a basis for theorizing, it drew the attention of the American sociologist Harvey Sacks (1984a) that people seek information about the other from the identification of categories to which the other belongs, such as occupation, religion, ethnicity, race, etc. From this observation, Sacks started, in the 1960s, the development of research on the way social members accomplish, use and orient themselves to categories when carrying out social actions (FITZGERALD; AU-YEUNG, 2019). A sociological approach of qualitative nature derives from his theory, called Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA).

According to Silverman (1998 p.85), an initial formulation of the notion of category was presented by Sacks (1984b) in a lecture held in the fall of 1964/spring of 1965, a few years after the assassination of President Kennedy. At the time, many people, in search of the meaning of that event, asked questions invoking categories: “Was he one of us right-wing Republicans? Was he one of us Negroes? Was he a Jew?” Sacks concludes that a stock of cultural knowledge and social norms of common-sense lead people to tie presumed activities to a certain category.

To show how categories are used as interpretive resources, Sacks (1984a) brings the famous example “The X cried. The Y picked it up,” an utterance taken from a story told by a child. In order to demonstrate

⁴ We use the term “turn” to refer to the time each user makes a post to perform an action in first or second position of an adjacent pair referring to the user’s turn to speak in writing with their interlocutor or interlocutors.

how we make sense of the story, the referents of the actions are erased and, without excluding other possibilities of interpretation, the author states that, given this statement, any reasonably competent person could immediately assume that X refers to a baby and Y to the mother (at least, we understand that this applies to most Western culture).

In a tutorial on Membership Categorization, Schegloff (2007, p. 469), clarifies:

The membership categories we are talking about are what Sacks termed ‘*inference-rich*’. They are the store house and the filing system for the common-sense knowledge that ordinary people – that means ALL people in their capacity as ordinary people – have about what people are like, how they behave, etc. This knowledge is stored and accessed by reference to categories of member/person”.

The concept of membership categorization device (MCD) refers to a collection of categories whose application is related to a set of rules (SACKS, 1971, 1972). Based on this device, the categories “baby” and “mother” are seen as belonging to the “family” collection, which has the duplicative organization property. According to this maxim, the members of this collection belong to the same unit, which explains why, in Sacks’s famous example, people infer that Y is not only someone’s mother, but precisely the mother of that baby.

The relationship between categories and activities is not, however, treated as fixed. As the author already pointed out, a member of a category may not be properly represented by the set of inferences made about that category. Likewise, an incumbent in a category may not correspond to what is known about that category. However, in such cases, people do not revise this commonsense knowledge, but see that person as an exception, or a defective member (SCHEGLOFF, 2007).⁵ In her research on police practice in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Valente (2016) noted that police officers that exhibited discrepant behaviors in relation to commonsense knowledge about their category were recategorized by community

⁵ “If an ostensible member of a category appears to contravene what is ‘known’ about members of the category, then people do not review that knowledge, but see the person as ‘an exception’, ‘different,’ or even a defective member of the category”. (SCHEGLOFF, 2007, p. 469)

residents as bandits. The activities performed by police officers and cited by the residents as linked to bandits included approaching favela residents in places without surveillance cameras, extorting money in case of irregularities in the vehicle or driver's documentation. Another example cited was that of causing damage to someone else's property, such as tearing a resident's motorcycle seat with a knife at night or humiliating residents during an approach.

Ron-Ren (2017) conducted research with military police officers who worked in social programs in the context of the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs). The analysis pointed to an effort by the interviewed policemen to build themselves as incumbent professionals in the "police" category, but with different attributes from those linked by common-sense to the category. Actions such as using the weapon and using force indiscriminately were criticized by the interviewees, who advocated for more technical and humane professional practices. On the other hand, these same "non-traditional" policemen reported that they were stigmatized by their peers, who reduced the social actions carried out to "embracing a criminal's child" and "delivering basic food items". Ultimately, the police officers interviewed were read as non-police, precisely because they were seen as defective members by their colleagues.

Watson (1983) goes further and shows that categories are not only linked to actions, but also to knowledge, beliefs, values, rights, duties, among others. MCA research has sought to examine how the category/predicate relationship can be intertwined with the moral order (JAYYUSI, 2015, 1991). Predicates associated with a category, such as behaviors, actions, ideas and opinions, are taken normatively as approved.

In a proposal to question the notion of normativity, Reynolds and Fitzgerald (2015) propose to examine how participants in oral public debates broadcast on social media orient themselves towards three types of relationship between categories and category predicates. For this, they use a method characterized by Reynolds (2011, 2013) as "enticing a challengeable". Although the method described does not apply to the type of data we are analyzing, it does provide key concepts involved in using categorization to carry out offensive actions. They are: identification of the challengeable point, a prerequisite for the formation of the adjacent pair (SACKS; SCHEGLOFF; JEFFERSON, 1974), assessment - agreement/disagreement; identification of the target, that is, of the person being challenged, and of the challenged, the one that reacts to the challenge.

Although we are in line with Watson's (1978) claim that sequence and categorization are two faces of the interaction, it is not always an easy task to use concepts related to the conversation organization for interactions that are not face-to-face and that are not carried out in the oral modality. In the study environment, for example, it is common for a post not to be addressed to a specific user, even though it is possible to do so from an explicit markup.⁶ Another aspect that must be problematized concerns the principle of conditional relevance (SCHEGLOFF, 1968). The first part of an adjacent pair makes the second part conditionally relevant. Therefore, subsequent responsive actions must be performed by the other participant, under penalty of moral sanctions if they are not done. In the virtual environment under examination, however, the social action performed on a post may not generate responsive actions, which will not imply moral sanctions. Likewise, the notion of adjacency can also be problematized from a temporal perspective. In the virtual environment, the second part of the adjacent pair can be performed months or years after its first part.

Despite the challenges presented, we are adopting here the approach of Housley and Fitzgerald (2002), who propose the integration of Ethnomethodology to Sacks's theory on conversation organization. As the authors justify, in addition to the analytical gains, the integration of these approaches provides a means of exploring interaction and discourse beyond macro-micro dualism. As highlighted by Housley and Fitzgerald (2015, p. 3), Sacks' concern with categorization practices "represented a move to a much finer level of granularity that renders visible the relationship between morality, practical action and the social organization of everyday social life through linguistic practice and the circulation, reception and use of texts." Along this line, the study proposed here seeks to examine how social life and social relationships are constituted and organized through the linguistic practices involved in carrying out the actions in the analyzed virtual interaction. In other words, analyzing virtual interactions and categorization practices allows us to describe how circulating discourses about ideological political polarization are used and, at the same time, locally (re)constructed by each user at each message exchange they perform.

⁶ Explicit marking is done when one user responds to the other and chooses to leave the name of their interlocutor (+name or, currently, @name) in evidence at the beginning of the message. This markup is not mandatory. The platform offers the option at the moment when the user starts his/her response and the user chooses to use it or not.

3 Flammable devices

The channel *Jornal A Nova Democracia* –AND (2008) is hosted on the YouTube digital platform and its mission is:

to build and emancipate the democratic and popular press, strengthening contact with the masses, publicizing their demands, their struggles, the crimes of the State against the people and thus helping to expand popular movements. AND has excelled in the news coverage of demonstrations, the militarization of favelas, and the removal of poor neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro. Don't read, don't read, bourgeois newspapers. Read the newspaper A Nova Democracia. (A NOVA DEMOCRACIA, 2008).

In accordance with this proposal, one of the themes dealt with in the national editorial section of the newspaper is “crimes against the people”. There, videos that record police actions in the favelas and events are shared and commented on by the news channel from the perspective of selectivity of the victims (the vulnerable), disrespect for human rights, and the abusive use of force by the police without justification. From this initial post with video e description, comments are posted on Youtube addressing the channel or another user who, due to the public security view defended, is seen as a member of the group considered to be left-wing (because they subscribe to the position of the Newspaper) or of the group considered to be right-wing (because they disagree with the position of the Newspaper). Based on this categorical attribution, users also build, in parallel conversations, a verbal and moral tug of war in which, on the one hand, are members of the “We” group (those who share the channel’s beliefs and values) and, on the other, the members of the “They” group (those who oppose these beliefs). Actions of assessment, agreement and disagreement about police practice point to the controversial relationship between public security x human rights.

In his studies on categorization, Sacks (1974) realized that one of the ways in which people categorize themselves is through the observation of the activities they perform, what he called the viewer’s maxim. According to the author, many times, participants (in interaction or not) are categorized based on the activities they perform. In other words, when we observe activities that are linked to a certain category being carried out by a member that can be categorized as belonging to that category, we do so. In our research, we understand that not only

activities, but also knowledge, beliefs, values, attributes, rights and duties (WATSON, 1983) that are observed, serve as a basis for inferring categories to which participants can orient themselves when interacting.

In our context, the different and diverse perspectives on public security and its relationship with human rights led to categorizations from the collection “political-ideological positioning”. Users who made comments on the videos categorized the people in the video and/or the journalists from the channel, based on their assessment of the police conduct, which, in turn, was used by other commentators to categorize users in the comment section and initiate arguments. Although the viewer’s maxim (SACKS, 1974) helps us to understand how members are categorized based on the activities they perform, it is also important to note that different “viewers” can access different stocks of knowledge-in-action and, thus, categorize the same member performing the same activity in different ways. This helps us to understand how the “tug of war” is built in these spaces, especially when it comes to controversial issues, such as public security, which necessarily involves discussions related to the role of the police and their action in our society.

Since the stocks of commonsense knowledge are not static, understandings about the category *police* – the focus of the stories and debates – were especially sensitive to two socio-political moments that Brazilian society went through: the dictatorship and the redemocratization of the country.

In an updated review of the field of police studies in the social sciences, Muniz *et al.* (2018) state that police practice did not take a leading role in pioneering studies on violence in Brazil. Based on a previous study (MUNIZ, 1999), the author reiterates that “it seemed sufficient, for the understanding of violence and crime, to treat the police as a generic abstraction, whose explanation was outside of it, in another also abstract and disincarnated entity, called State” (MUNIZ; CARUSO; FREITAS, 2018, p. 151). In this position, the agency of the State stood out from that of the police, seen as a repressive apparatus of that institution. The belief that an “enemy” – communism – threatened the social order led a part of society to either ignore the methods of social control used by the police or to justify them in the name of preserving individual security and public order. The police were understood by many, at that time, as a guarantee of security, order, of the law in favor of society.

Also according to Muniz *et al.* (2018), it was in the socio-political context of the 1980s and 1990s that the bibliographic production of police studies grew both quantitatively and qualitatively. With the increase in urban crime, the redemocratization of the country and the consequent advance of citizenship, the thematic repertoire of police studies has expanded. Among the themes, we highlight, for the purposes of this work, the inclusion of the topic public security and the theme “law and order x human rights,” identified by Adorno (2001 *apud* MUNIZ *et al.*, 2018).

According to Nucci (2016), the spaces of this controversy go beyond everyday conversations, as they are also manifested in the practice of law, although under another nomenclature. According to the author, both members of the Judiciary and operators of Law evaluate Chambers and Classes “as strict (in theory, those who defend public security) and liberal (in theory, those that value human rights)” (NUCCI, 2016, p. 11). The author also adds that judges are categorized either as defenders of human rights or as adamant adherents of public security (NUCCI, 2016). And he concludes:

The view captured by the lawyer, the prosecutor, the delegate, the public or dative defender leads to a distorted analysis of the matter, as it implies that the human rights judge cares little for public security, as well as the magistrate who values public order is not linked to humanist precepts. The misunderstanding has always seemed evident, since the real culprits are the abuses brought about by the regrettable radicalization of any topic. (NUCCI, 2016, p. 11)

In a work that promotes the debate about the controversial relationship between public security and human rights in a Democratic State of Law, Nucci (2016, p. 10) asks: “After all, do human rights prevent the desired public security? Do they exclude each other? Or do they complement each other?”.

According to Nunes (2020), dissent on the topic can be understood as a symptom and instrument of polarization. In fact, this is what is observed in the analyzed posts. Both AND and users understand their opponents’ stance as radical, which becomes a pretext for radicalized responsive actions as well. In this context, each side only reaffirms its beliefs, which encourages interactional exchanges of an antagonistic nature (HOUSLEY *et al.*, 2017), marked by verbal and moral violence.

In addition to the content, another factor that potentiated the war between “We” and “They” was what Lin and Tian (2018) called the layout

or technical design of the channel. From research on how participants engage in a public debate on the social network *Weibo* (a Chinese equivalent of Twitter), the authors noted that the fact that communication is restricted to written text and the possibility of simultaneous interactions with multiple audiences – unknown and separated in time in space – contributed to make some users feel confused in relation to the context in which they interact and the audience they are targeting.

In the case of AND, access to the channel may have been the result of a search process on the topic of police practice. However, many of the users may be unaware of the Newspaper's editorial line, since it is not presented on the same page where the videos are shared. The user can infer from the title given to the video and material produced by the newspaper that the target audience of AND are people and groups who share the same evaluations expressed there. This misunderstanding can be resolved when users realize that different audiences participate in the comments section. But they can also assume that the Newspaper activates the mechanism offered by the tool to retain the messages for analysis before publishing them, which was not a practice at least during the analyzed period.

In the data analyzed here, we present evidence of types of confusion that also contributed to interpersonal tension and to the categorization work as an offensive resource.⁷ One of them concerns the interactional context, the understanding of what is happening in the comments section:

EXCERPT 1

Video title: RJ: Police officers caught red-handed terrorizing protesters and censoring the democratic press

Post date: Jul 18 of 2013

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rp0_1122PrQ

Video description: Jornal A Nova Democracia – Last Wednesday night, thousands of people protested in the access to the street where the governor of Rio de Janeiro, Sérgio Cabral Filho lives. Protesters denounced corruption in the Cabral administration, the spillage of public money, the removal of poor

⁷As informed in the introduction, to maintain confidentiality, the print screen feature was not used, and users' avatars (images used in the profile) and names (and pseudonyms) were also modified. The data transcription was faithful to the users' original text.

neighborhoods due to mega-events, the extermination of youth in the slums and the attack on indigenous peoples.

Protesters walked through the streets of Leblon, one of the most expensive neighborhoods in the world. A few meters from Cabral’s house, the police officers will not hesitate to attack. But as has happened repeatedly, the masses have bravely resisted and faced the repression troops of the fascist State.

1. Júlio	The problem about the demonstrators is that they are like
2	the gay activists if you are not with them
3	you are against them. Answering your question
4	“Why doesn’t the Police arrest the bandits inside and
5	outside the demonstrations instead of abusing power and
6	force?” it’s simple the police isn’t crazy enough to get into
7	the protests if they get into it they
8	DIE simple as that someone may stab or
9	cut them that’s why they do not get in
10. Tadeu	Don’t joke...he he he
11. Bianca	Do like this instead of being in this tug of war
12	of who is right and who is wrong that is ridiculous,
13	respect my opinion about the police and I will respect
14	yours. Because my view of the generational change
15	in this country, government, politics and the like is not
16	the same as yours THANK GOD FOR THE DIVERSITY
17	OF THOUGHT. Why don’t the Police arrest the bandits
18	inside and outside the demonstrations instead of
19	abusing power and force? Please spare me, I have been
20	to all protests in my city and I saw
21	the BUFFOONERY from close.

The actions of the participants reveal different understandings of what is happening in the comments section. Júlio’s post is guided by a categorization work in which negative predicates are locally associated with the “demonstrator” category. Right at the beginning of the post, Júlio uses a comparison to equate the position of protesters with that of gay activists (l. 1-3). Then, he introduces a response to a question asked by another participant (l. 4-6) that associates the category “police” with the activity of arresting a bandit, and not that of using excessive force against people who are not criminals. In its moral dimension, the question brings conflicting norms about expectations regarding police work. Júlio’s

answer to the question is made through accounts (SCOTT; LYMAN, 1968; ANTAKI, 1994) that imply the categorization of protesters as criminals (l. 6-9).

Bianca, in her comment, demonstrates the understanding that Júlio's post is not focused on a debate on the contestable point. What Júlio is doing there is inciting a tug of war, delegitimizing the target as a competent appraiser. She then starts her turn, proposing an agreement ("do the following", l. 11), which points to the confusion about what the participants are doing there: a tug of war or a debate; and she also points to an essential condition for a debate: respect for the other's opinions.

Another confusion observed refers to what users understand as the AND audience:

EXCERPT 2

Video title: IN TRIBUNE # 2: 'THE IMMINENT REBELLION' with Vladimir Safatle

Post date: It debuted on Dec 16. of 2019

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Yy1SAMuAqY&t=854s>

Video description: The newspaper *A Nova Democracia* invites progressives, democrats and popular organizations to debate the most varied topics of importance to the Brazilian people! In this edition 2 of 'Na Tribuna' we invited the philosopher and professor Vladimir Safatle.

1. Celso	@Mário I know Internet haters without an education like
2	you, people like you do not believe in truth,
3	they have a Google culture. Besides being no goods
4	for being leftists. I am not an idler like
5	you, I have no time for your bullshit, you
6	have already been humiliated here and even so you do not stop. Find
7	someone else to annoy.
8. Mário	@Celso Friend, you are the one who is spreading hate in the channel,
9	I am agreeing with the video, made in a
10	channel for me, by a thinker of similar
11	ideas And what is to be educated? Believing in the
12	black book of communism? In the defamations of
13	Krushev? In the propaganda of William Hearst?
14	I also know several anti-communist on
15	internet, they have never read Marx and believe in

16	Lenin's decalogue, perhaps the only one was
17	a philosophy professor, a classic liberal, but not even
18	he takes these pseudo-study, sensationalist
19	propaganda seriously.

For the members of the “We” group, the channel would be an “echo chamber” (SUNSTEIN, 2008), that is, a space for users who share certain ideological and political convictions. But as it does not work like a bubble, members of the “They” group apparently enter this space to troll, that is, to tease people and inflame discussions. There is no effort to put different views into dialogue.

Celso, for example, attacks anyone he identifies as a target (a member of the “We” group), enumerating negative predicates locally associated with the category he attributes to Mário. Celso starts his turn by categorizing Mário as a “hater,” “people without an education,” “people who have a Google culture,” in addition to attributing his belonging to a group whose members would have similar characteristics. Then, he introduces the predicate “no good” as a consequence of Mário’s political positioning.

It is interesting to note that the category “leftist” is attributed to Mário by Celso and not a ratification of categorization made by Mário himself in previous messages. According to Sacks (1974), when we observe someone performing an action or exhibiting attributes that are linked to a category, we see that person as a member of that category. Returning to the example of the mother and baby given earlier, we could say that this mother is also a woman, a businesswoman, a wife and other various possibilities. However, as we see this person picking up the child, we see her, in that context, as a mother and not as a member of another category. In our data, we need to adjust the theory, designed for face-to-face interaction contexts, for the context of computer-mediated message exchanges. In written interactions on the *YouTube* platform, it can be seen that inferences about categories are made almost exclusively based on comments made by users and their actions, except for the cases in which names and avatars that are socio-culturally associated with categories of political-ideological nature are used. Celso and Mário did not have names or photos that would lead to their attribution to any point on the political spectrum. In exchanges immediately prior to excerpt 2 (absent in the article due to space), the two users showed their different positions

on democracies and dictatorships. Although he did not categorize himself as a “leftist,” Mário’s negative evaluations of the capitalist countries and democratic sayings were sufficient for Celso to categorize him as a leftist.

In his response, Mário tacitly accepts the political categorization attributed to him, but refutes those of “*hater*” and “without an education,” counter-accusing Celso of being a member of the same categories that had been attributed to him. For Mário, the channel was made for members of the “We” group, that is, for those who share ideas similar to those defended by AND. It can be inferred that, in Mário’s view, the one who disagrees is the outsider (intruder) and, as such, would not have the right to a voice.

What is observed, in a general way in the exchanges of comments, is that often activities and attributes that would not be linked to categories of political-ideological order in other times and spaces, are so in the studied context. In addition, there are no categorizations in this space that do not attribute to the other user an extreme political-ideological position. Thus, descriptions and evaluations of actions and people in the videos are “observed” from the ideological and political point of view of each user. The use of categorization as an offense demonstrates, in a polarized context, intolerance to ideological differences. Disagreements are reinforced, and the conflict is escalated.

4 The fuse

Looking at the categorization work in a sequential perspective requires analyzing the design of the first part of the assessment sequence, which also resulted in an extensive assessment activity initiated by other users. The excerpt below reports how police action is described during a demonstration.

EXCERPT 3

Video title: RJ: Police officers caught red-handed terrorizing protesters and censoring the democratic press

Post date: Jul 18 of 2013

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rp0_1122PrQ

Video description: Jornal A Nova Democracia – Last Wednesday night, thousands of people protested in the access to the street where the governor of Rio de Janeiro, Sérgio Cabral Filho lives. Protesters denounced corruption in the Cabral administration, the spillage of public money, the removal of poor

neighborhoods due to mega-events, the extermination of youth in the slums, and the attack on indigenous peoples.

Protesters walked through the streets of Leblon, one of the most expensive neighborhoods in the world. A few meters from Cabral's house, police officers will not hesitate [sic] to attack. But as has happened repeatedly, the masses have bravely resisted and faced the repression troops of the fascist State.

As the title already announces, the post is built from a relational pair: aggressor x victim. The categorization of the police as aggressors, as an instrument of the State, is invoked through activities linked to the category "terrorist" (*terrorizing*) and "criminal," since the police are doing an illegal action: repressing free expression, a right guaranteed in the Federal Constitution (BRASIL, 1988) in its article 5, item IX.

The categorization of protesters as victims goes beyond the fact that they are the target of police repressive action on behalf of the State. The action of denouncing corruption, in addition to reinforcing the categories of victim (since we, citizens, are victims of corruption, of the misuse of public money and removals) and aggressor, also invokes the categories of denouncer-denounced, which, in turn, also invoke different attributes in the commonsense knowledge. Predicates are attributed to the denouncer (not to an informer) that position them as someone of "integrity," honest, among others; in relation to the denounced category, attributes such as "corrupt," "dishonest," "criminal" etc. can be invoked.

Only after this description does the police action report begin. The circumstances presented also serve to condemn the police action. The activity of the protesters (*walked through the streets*) is not linked to the category of "rioters," but to that of people making peaceful protests. The formulation of place (SCHEGLOFF, 1972), "Leblon," invokes the commonsense knowledge that it is a rich neighborhood, that is, a place where members of the social class are protected by the police. In this line, the description of the scene refers to a class struggle: police action is associated with war actions (*attacks*) and the action of the people with *resisting*. Because of these differences in action, the police are categorized as a repressive instrument of the State, the aggressor, and the protesters, as victims.

Another important feature regarding the description of the video concerns the epistemic primacy claimed by the channel. Because it has privileged access or experience/knowledge of what is being evaluated

(POMERANTZ, 1984), AND claims the right and the competence to affirm what it defends (HERITAGE; RAMOND, 2005). In the formulations, lexical resources scale up the impropriety of the aggressors' actions and scale down that of the protesters. As Drew (1998) notes, in relation to complaints, all the resources mobilized there serve to provide an assessment of what is right and what is wrong. Everything serves the purpose of the channel: to condemn police action.

As Stivers *et al.* (2011, p. 3) remind us, it is at the microinteractional level that “moral calibrations’ have consequences for our social relationships, most directly through our moment-by-moment alignments and affiliations with others”. Given the technical design of the channel, the initial post can either promote responsive actions to share the indignation expressed by the newspaper, or it can provoke reactions of indignation from those who challenge the position defended in the initial post.

In the excerpts below, we examine some of the “inflamed” posts where the target was the Channel itself. As we had already mentioned, it should be noted that the initial post was published in 2013, but, for many years, it generated responsive actions, especially those that disagree with the assessments produced by the Channel.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 1. Raul | Such biased news I thought it was on globo |
| 2 | JORNAL NOVA DEMOCRACIA = GLOBO NETWORK |

In his post, Raul criticizes the AND bias through an irony (“I thought it was on Globo”).⁸ To conclude, then, (l. 2) that both media do the same type of ideologically biased journalism. In his response, Gustavo reacts not to the issue of bias in the type of journalism practiced, but to an issue of an ideological nature. Historically, Globo was perceived as a right-wing vehicle, mainly for its support for the military dictatorship. However, more recently, a large part of those who categorize themselves as right-wing claim that Globo is left-wing, for its fight against the Bolsonaro government. Therefore, the point of disagreement is to relate something as linked to another erroneously.

⁸ Rede Globo, or simply Globo, is a Brazilian free-to-air television network. Globo is the largest commercial TV network in Latin America and the second-largest commercial TV network in the world just behind the American ABC Television Network and the largest producer of telenovelas.

EXCERPT 4

1. Gustavo	+Raul It is the polar opposite of Globo. One is notably right wing and geared to greedy ends, the other, in favor of the population. If the headline were in any of Globo media, it would be: “Lazy demonstrators cause disorder in building of one of our buddies”
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In line 1, the comparison error is invoked by categorizing AND as the opposite of Globo’s ideological identity. With accounts, Gustavo justifies the categorization of Globo as right-wing by its capitalist model, here associated with a practice that aims at exaggerated profit (“greedy ends” – l. 2). And the categorization of AND takes place by an implicit contrast: if Globo is right-wing, AND is the opposite, anti-capitalist extreme. To illustrate the difference, Gustavo brings a fictional headline to the same scene that, produced by Globo, would associate the protesting category with negative predicates such as “lazy,” disorderly (“cause disorder” – l. 5) and protector of other capitalists (“our buddies” – l. 6).

Another way to see how the design of the initial post of the Channel enticed challenge actions is to analyze the series of responsive actions carried out by the challengers:

EXCERPT 5

1. Diego	Good indeed.. you really gotta beat up this crap
2	Indeed...
3. Fabio	You gotta beat up these shirty bums
4. Leandro	Demonstrators my ass.. go all fuck
5	yourselfes...bunch of worms... go to work, you
6	piece of shit...fuck off...black crap
8. Vinicius	A lot of little playboys Daddy’s boy who
9	have nothing to do

In this excerpt, Diego makes his disagreement through the approval of the police action and the categorization of the protester as “crap”. In affiliation with Diego’s action, Fábio agrees with the repression method used by the police (“beat up” – l. 3) and introduces other negative predicates locally associated with the protesting category (“shitty bums” – l. 3). Leandro, in yet another responsive action of agreement with Diego,

curses and introduces other negative predicates: “bunch of worms” (l. 5), people who do not work (“go to work” – l. 5) “you piece of shit,” “black crap” (l. 6). Another turn of agreement is produced by Vinícius, who categorizes the protesters as “little playboys Daddy’s boy, (folks) who have nothing to do” (l. 8-9).

Actions accomplished in series, such as the ones presented, show that challengers also work as a team to provoke the target, the challenged, reinforcing the local association of negative predicates (bum, those who do not work, little playboy, Daddy’s boy) to the protesting category. It is argued, therefore, that certain categories are seen as threats to society and that, against these categories, all methods of social control are accepted for the sake of security.

EXCERPT 6

1. Luís	They really got to be killed
2. Gael	Do you think those fucking vandals should be
3	dispersed only with those water cannons
4	that the police used?? Did you find it abusive
5	on the part of the police??? What is lacking, my
6	bro, is a greater police action! We, the good
7	people want safety in our businesses.
8	We want these delinquents out of society,
9	caged in prison or dead by the police. And you,
10	shameless journalists, who preach about a reversal
11	of values, deserve to go to jail!!!

In this sequence, Luís agrees with the methods used by the police, admitting the escalation of the degree of violence accepted in the fight against the protesters. Gael’s responsive action is in line with what Luís proposes, after ratifying the escalation of repression, formulated in terms of “greater police action” (l. 6). The turn begins with the categorization of protesters as “vandals” and the endorsement of Luís’s assessment through a series of questions that imply another assessment: “a greater police action is lacking” (l. 5-6). After this action of agreement with his interlocutor, Gael introduces an account to justify his position using a moral categorization that divides society into: “good people” (l. 6-7) and

people who are not good, in which protesters are being included. It is, as a member of the “good people” category, that Gael justifies the defense of extreme methods of punishment against those who compromise order, who must be “out of society”. Categorizing the protesters as “delinquents,” he suggests what is done with dangerous animals (caged in prison), or what is done with enemies in a situation of war (killing).

The categorization process undertaken by those who approve of police action is repeatedly justified by the defense of order, that is, of what affects the movement of people or businesses. It is based on this commonsense reasoning that some users understand that security is above everything, even democratic values. For those who defend order in these terms, the relational pair is reversed: the State is the victim, the aggressors are the protesters.

5 The spread of fire in parallel conversations

The polarization of right/left positions reverberates in parallel conversations, that is, those that are generated from the post of any user and can promote responses by one or more users who are opposed to what has been posted. One of the consequences of this polarization is radicalization in the formulation of assessments:

EXCERPT 7

Video title: RJ: Military police promotes violent eviction against families that occupied Eike Batista’s building

Post date: Apr 14 of 2015

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9pdbr-AdaQ>

Video description: Jornal A Nova Democracia – At dawn from the 13th to the 14th of April, the Military Police from Rio de Janeiro went to the Flamengo neighborhood, south of the city, to carry out an eviction order against 150 families who occupied a building owned by businessman and ham, Eike Batista. The families had already been evicted a month ago from a CEDAE land in the port region. After almost two weeks living on the streets of the Center, the homeless decided to occupy the abandoned building.

According to complaints from the occupants, as soon as they arrived, police threatened to set the building on fire with the families inside. Very nervous, a six-month-old pregnant woman went to the bathroom and ended up giving birth to her child right there, in a toilet. The police refused to help mother and

son and only changed their minds when a chair was thrown from within the occupation against a police vehicle. The mother was separated from her son and both were taken to the hospital in Botafogo. At this moment, the two are hospitalized in the Miguel Couto hospital and the baby is still alive, breathing with the help of devices.

Residents rejected the suggestion of city hall representatives to go to a shelter in Santa Cruz. However, in the face of the huge police apparatus, the families agreed to leave peacefully. While they were leaving, mattresses were set on fire inside the building and a woman's son became trapped inside the building in the middle of the fire. The desperation of the mother and people who came to her defense was the password for the police to cowardly fire pepper spray at women, the elderly and infants. In addition to the assault, several homeless people ended up in prison for resisting police violence.

1. Francisco	Congratulations to the police!
2. Márcio	+Francisco ???? for throwing pepper spray at
3	a baby??
4. Francisco	For throwing pepper spray..... watch the video
5	with attention... if the building is not theirs : FUCK OFF
6	BRO! They asked them to get out, and they did not get out... patience,
7	Those who stay are to blame.
8. Márcio	If the “building” was empty it is better to stay there
9	than on the street and you watch the “video” with
10	“attention”
11. Francisco	The police are right, there are no arguments.... there is
12	nothing to say against it.
13. Márcio	The police are never right
14. Francico	Are the bandits right, then? My goodness this brazil
15	is over indeed

As can be seen, in this parallel conversation, Francisco's post brings the challengeable point: the approval of the police action in the eviction of the families that occupied the empty building of Eike Batista. In his response (l. 2-3), Márcio introduces an ironic question that entices the challenge, since violence against a baby tends to be a norm disapproved by any human being. Francisco reacts to the challenge with a non-conforming answer (RAYMOND, 2006), therefore, not accepting

the agenda that Márcio's question potentially establishes. According to Raymond (2006), non-conforming responses are used methodically in the sequence of turns at talk by the participants to manage problems or misalignments in relation to particular choices that are posed by the polar questions.

Thus, Francisco responds to Márcio's challenge while refraining from agreeing to a morally charged action as formulated by Márcio. Then he uses accounts to justify approval: the right to property ("the building is not theirs" – 1.5), the police's kindness ("asked to get out" – 1.6), and the responsibility of those who decided to stay. Márcio (l. 8) still tries to counter the arguments by invoking another moral norm: that the vulnerable must be protected, which would justify the invasion of an empty building.

Francisco, instead of arguments, closes the challenge by formulating his assessment as an absolute truth, since he says there is no possibility of counter-arguments (l. 11-12). Márcio (l. 13) follows in the same direction. Through an extreme case formulation (POMERANTZ, 1986, p. 219), used to "defend against or to counter challenges to the legitimacy of complaints, accusations, justifications and defenses" Márcio challenges Francisco's assessment with another radicalized assessment ("the police are never right" – l. 13).

Through an extreme case formulation (POMERANTZ, 1986, p. 219), used to "defend against or counter disputes related to the legitimacy of complaints, accusations, justifications and defenses," Márcio challenges Francisco's assessment with another radicalized assessment ("the police are never right" – l. 13).

Returning to the dispute, Francisco resorts to the categorization of those families as bandits, because they occupied a building that is not theirs and did not respect the police "requests". This categorization invokes the police-bandit relational pair, which, in turn, refers to commonsense understandings of some groups, which do not recognize bandits as citizens, which excludes the possibility that security and human rights can complement each other.

The moral dimension of the categorizations reveals that the participants are oriented by different norms, with different repertoires of commonsense knowledge. Therefore, the issue of public security x human rights also contributes to the attribution of a given dialogical identity:

EXCERPT 8

Video title: Young man is murdered by UPP Police officers in the Favela do Jacarezinho

Post date: Jan 6 of 2016

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXcJ7ir0Zpw>

Video description: Jornal A Nova Democracia — On the night of December 29, policemen from the Pacifying Police Unit of the Favela do Jacarezinho, in the northern zone of Rio, shot and killed 17-year-old Wesley Daniel Santos Oliveira. The young man was leaving a service at the church *Resgatando Almas*, in Beira do Rio, when he was hit by three shots: in the chest, in the belly and in the head. The next day, in revolt, residents protested demanding justice for the murderers of Wesley Daniel.

The reports of AND and the Independent and Collective Media followed the act from start to finish. Along the way, residents spared no criticism of the terror routine imposed by the UPP since January 2013.

1. Dario	The armed wing of the State is always annihilating the
2	lives of the poorest and the blackest. Reading the
3	comment of some imbeciles it is clear that we live
4	in a sick, dumb, prejudiced and
5	selfish society. As Dep. Marcelo Freixo once said, dignity
6	has a ZIP code. Killing someone poor in the favela has no
7	consequences. This war has existed since 1809. It used to be
8	the Royal Guard, now it is the bourgeois police.
9	Comment (response) removed by the user or
10	channel
11. Dario	Try and read a little, you imbecile. Freixo
12	receives death threats until today for having put
13	vagabonds like Alvaro Lins into jail. Freixo
14	does not defend vagabond, he just sees everyone as
15	human beings. Arguing with idiots like you is
16	a waste of time.
17. Fernando	+ Dario Good one, communist, up there in North Korea there is no
18	bourgeoisie, move up there, everybody is
19	equal. Everybody is POOR. You animal.

20.	Dario	North Korea everybody poor??? You are watching
21		too much Globo News or reading too many stories in
22		Sputnik. Because the argument of you
23		reactionaries is always the same... Go live there,
24		sell everything you own... A basic reading in
25		any work by Marx, Trotsky or Lenin would
26		be enough to do away with your ignorance. What an attachment
27		you have with capitalism. You cannot see a thing
28		outside the box. Do some reading guy, stop following
29		the herd, try and argue with some
30		theoretical basis.

Dario's post is simultaneously a responsive action to previous posts by some users, categorized as *imbeciles*, for disagreeing with the channel's assessment; and an initial action of a sequence in which Fernando's responsive action is of disagreement.⁹

Dario shows his belonging to the "We" group by sharing the feeling of indignation expressed in the initial post of the channel. As a second assessment (POMERANTZ, 1984), he does not just agree with the condemnation of the police action that resulted in the death of an innocent person. He upgrades his agreement by means of an extreme case formulation ("the armed wing of the State always annihilating the lives of the poorest and blackest" – l. 1-2). Then, through predicates, he categorizes users addressed as members of a "sick, stupid, prejudiced and selfish" society (l. 4-5), categorical aspects that are repeatedly invoked as locally associated with those that are categorized as right-wing. To support his assessment of the selectivity of victims of police action, Dario brings the voice of then Deputy Marcelo Freixo (l. 11) as an argument and presents historical data to categorize the police as an instrument of the State in favor of elites and against the vulnerable.

In his response, Fernando makes Dario's categorization as a communist explicit. In the corpus, it was observed that defending vulnerable people and human rights leads to the inference that the user is "left-wing," a process that Sacks (1974) called the viewer's maxim. And,

⁹ We emphasize that it is not possible to know which user or why he has removed his comment on lines 09 and 10

by means of predication, Fernando reframes the category “communist,” since he associates with this category some predicates as people who hate the elite and like the poor; someone who wants a country where there are no rich people; and, for all this, they deserve to be called animals, because they are devoid of reason.

Dario’s reaction follows the same direction. He begins with a question that implies not a request for information, but an assessment that Fernando’s statement is not correct. This endorses the implicit statement that Fernando does not know what he is talking about, ascribing this lack of knowledge to his sources of information.

Based on common sense knowledge, Dario inferred from Fernando’s argument (“Go live there and sell everything you own”) that Fernando is a reactionary (l. 23). Posing himself as the one with the most knowledge, he recommends “basic readings on Marx, Engels, Trotsky or Lenin” (l. 24-25). However, the predicates associated locally with this category range from a lack of knowledge (ignorant) to not having one’s own opinion (follows the herd – l. 29).

The “capitalist” category, on the other hand, associated locally with the “reactionary” category, is invoked based on the common sense of some groups that disparage capitalists because they see them as people who only want to profit and exploit others, which, according to other commonsense knowledge, may not apply to any reactionary, nor to any capitalist.

It is noteworthy here that predicates related to lack of knowledge are recurrent when the offense is directed at those who are categorized as “right-wing”. In Dario’s post, this is manifest in the rhetorical questions that initiate his responsive action and in activities that are locally associated with ignorance, such as those that refer to sources of information seen either as superficial or as biased. Also, regarding the inferiority of the other due to lack of knowledge, the methodical use of reading recommendations, the need for a theoretical basis for the other to be able to argue, also proved to be recurrent.

6 Final considerations

In this work, we proposed to examine the phenomenon of categorization as an offensive resource. For doing so, we analyzed the posts published by the digital newspaper AND on police actions in Rio de Janeiro, and the comments of users who took part in the discussions.

We started by identifying some factors that favored the war between “We” and “They,” materialized in the use of categorization as an offensive resource. The first factor identified was the content of the articles published by the newspaper. In line with its mission – “to publicize the crimes of the State against the people” – the journalistic stories about the shared videos show a negative evaluation of the police action, justified by the abusive use of force and disrespect to the right to human dignity.

The controversial nature of the relationship between security and human rights has become the challengeable point for discussions between users in their comments. At a time marked by the escalation of criminality in the country, the dissent over this relationship was radicalized by commonsense understandings that “defending human rights is defending criminals,” or that “defending security is defending life and order, regardless of the methods used for social control”.

In a context of ideological and political polarization, each of these understandings was linked through the categorization process to an ideological and political position. Those who defend human rights are seen as left-wing; and whoever defends security at any price is seen as right-wing. Thus, any possibility of renewing commonsense knowledge on the topic is rendered unfeasible, reiterating the understanding that one position excludes the other.

The analysis also revealed that the technical design of the tool also contributed to the comment space being built as a bipartite political field. The channel does not function as an echo chamber, inasmuch as participation is open to multiple audiences. However, unlike other channels, AND does not activate the option that makes it possible to retain comments for analysis before publishing them. With this, radicalized positions promoted radicalized formulations, which led each side to reaffirm its ideological positions. It was also observed that responsive actions to assessments led users to distinguish “friends” from “enemies”. Those who agreed on an assessment were seen as friends because they share the same beliefs. Those who disagreed were seen as enemies because they thought otherwise.

These results show that the situated analysis of the categorization practice, in sequences of assessment/ agreement x disagreement, allowed us to understand that the re-signification of categories as offense occurred through morally disapproved predicates, associated locally with a given

category. It also allowed us to describe how the circulating discourses on political-ideological polarization are used and, at the same time, locally (re)constructed by each user at each message exchange they carry out.

Contribution of the authors

We declare that the authors contributed equally to this work. Carolina Valente performed the survey and data collection, in addition to organizing them in collections to use categorizations as offense. Maria do Carmo Leite de Oliveira was responsible for writing the introduction, theoretical review and final remarks. Rony Ron-REN collaborated with the theoretical review and its application to the data, besides revising the text. Together, the authors analyzed the data and contributed to the final writing of all sections of the article.

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