



Aggression as impoliteness in a Facebook discussion about class discrimination in a Brazilian university

Agressão como descortesia em uma discussão no Facebook sobre discriminação de classe em uma universidade brasileira

Mércia Regina Santana Flannery

University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania / United States

merciaf@sas.upenn.edu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4206-1162>

Abstract: This paper exemplifies the use of aggression as impoliteness in computer-mediated, or digital communication in Brazilian Portuguese, while looking into the performance of such linguistic actions in the context of a discussion about class discrimination. Specifically, it investigates the relationship between linguistic aggression as impoliteness, and identity as observed in a Facebook campaign page about a Brazilian university. The page under consideration was devised as an open platform to disseminate and call attention to examples of discriminatory behaviors experienced by students from peripheric communities attending an elite university in Rio de Janeiro. These students were at the center of a controversy, as they were supposedly brought to this institution through social programs promoted by the previous, leftist oriented governments. This paper examines the use of linguistic aggression as impoliteness, such as name calling and overt disagreement (LORENZO-DUS; BLITVICH; BOU-FRANCH, 2011), to communicate different opinions about, or argue against, the perceived instances of discrimination supplied by the students in the campaign and subsequently discussed by the participants in their posts. These impoliteness strategies ratify identities in the context of the discussion, marking in and outside group members, as the participants 1) align against, or 2) justify, the described behaviors.

Keywords: Aggression; impoliteness; identity; narrative; discrimination; Facebook; digital communication.

Resumo: Este artigo exemplifica o emprego de agressão como descortesia na comunicação mediada, ou digital, no português brasileiro, observando-se o desempenho de tais ações linguísticas no contexto de uma discussão sobre discriminação de classe. Especificamente, investiga-se a relação entre agressão linguística como descortesia e identidade tal como observada em uma campanha em uma página do Facebook sobre uma universidade brasileira. A página sob consideração foi projetada como uma plataforma aberta para disseminar e chamar a atenção para exemplos de comportamentos discriminatórios vivenciados pelos estudantes de comunidades periféricas frequentando uma universidade de elite no Rio de Janeiro. Os membros desta comunidade estudantil estavam no centro de uma controvérsia, por supostamente terem sido admitidos na instituição por meio de programas sociais promovidos por governos anteriores, de tendência esquerdista. Este artigo examina o uso de agressão linguística como descortesia, tais como chamar nomes, i.e., dirigir-se a alguém empregando termos insultuosos, e discordar diretamente (LORENZO-DUS; BLITVICH; BOU-FRANCH, 2011), para comunicar diferentes opiniões sobre, ou argumentar contra, as percebidas instâncias de discriminação supridas pelos estudantes na campanha e subsequentemente discutidas pelos participantes nas suas postagens. Estas estratégias de descortesia ratificam as identidades no contexto da discussão, marcando membros e não-membros do grupo, na medida em que os participantes 1) alinham-se contra, ou 2) justificam os comportamentos descritos.

Palavras-chave: Agressão; descortesia; identidade; narrativas; discriminação; Facebook; comunicação digital.

Submitted on June 07th, 2020

Accepted on August 24th, 2020

1 Introduction

According to Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1995, p.146-148), cordiality is one of Brazilians' defining attributes. This cordiality would entail both an aversion to formalities or confrontation in social settings, and a tendency to transfer the intimacy of close family relationships to the public sphere. Holanda's writings have been extensively drawn upon to explain Brazilians' conduct in social contexts, and perhaps a penchant for corruption in some politicians, but it has also been questioned as traditional norms of civility in public discourse have been broken more often, and as digital communication, particularly interactions through social media, can illustrate (see also FLANNERY, 2017; FLANNERY, forthcoming; SCHWARCZ, 2019).

As a brief consultation of Portuguese dictionaries will show, there are more than ninety words to define impoliteness in this language, or someone who is considered impolite. In line with Culpeper's discussion (2014) about the "what" and the "how" of impoliteness studies, the ideas most often associated with those terms in the Portuguese dictionaries reflect a connection between the perception of an aggressive, or impolite individual, and actions that show a "predisposition to hostile behavior." This is the kind of behavior under consideration in this article and being referred to with aggression as impoliteness as aggression. Specifically, this impolite and aggressive behavior is analyzed in the context of interactions involving Brazilian participants of a popular social media page whose main audience consists of university students.

The relationship between linguistic aggression as impoliteness and identity (BLITVICH; SIFIANOU, 2017; GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2013; UPADHYAY, 2010) is seen in the responses and reactions supplied by a group of participants of a Facebook page designed as a campaign against class discrimination in a university in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The page under consideration was started as a platform for students from underprivileged backgrounds, who had felt that they had experienced discrimination on campus, to disseminate and call attention to their stories. It was meant, according to the information supplied in its description, as a way to request action from the university's authorities against the manifestation of such class prejudice and discrimination toward this student population on campus.

The university is a well-known institution for its exclusive reach, for a long time being acceded only by students from the elites, as it is a private, catholic, and very expensive institution for the average middle-class family. However, during the left oriented government of Lula da Silva, and subsequently Dilma Rousseff, some measures made it possible for students from underprivileged backgrounds to gain admittance to universities such as this one.

The Facebook page, however, was intended to expose some discriminatory episodes involving the privileged and the underprivileged, which highlighted differences in their lifestyle, academic performance, perceptions of the world and of the other, and even questioned the appropriateness of the underprivileged students' admittance to the university. The page creators, also students from the same institution, requested the larger student community at the university to post their

testimonies containing personal narratives as evidence of a prevalent discriminatory attitude on campus.

The cases of linguistic aggression as impoliteness examined in this article were extracted from the reactions to such narratives of discrimination (FLANNERY, 2008a, FLANNERY, forthcoming), when the participants perform agreement, and disagreement with, or show solidarity toward, the narrators of these accounts (FLANNERY, 2017). This page was started in October of 2016 and received widespread national and international media attention¹, as the experiences posted brought to light cases of class discrimination in this very prestigious university.

As a subset of computer mediated or, more broadly, digital communication, the language employed in these responses shows specificities of Brazilian Portuguese, pointing to the perception of actions that are inappropriate for their context, while the participants also use conventional resources and strategies typical of the medium. Given the widespread use of such social media platforms in Brazil, which is both the country with the third highest number of subscribers to Facebook in the world, and the third highest number of hours spent online², the study of impoliteness in this context can be useful in adding to the body of work on language and social media, more broadly. Additionally, given how these online platforms have become such widespread means of divulging opinions and mobilizing groups for activism, those interested in the study of discrimination, prejudice and aggression in discourse can access a wealth of natural occurring data, as well as gain some insight into the kinds of strategies most often used by the participants of such platforms. This research on narratives of discrimination online and the reactions and discussions that ensue have made salient a widespread use of aggressive language in online discussion forums and social media in Brazil (see FLANNERY, 2015, 2017).

Such studies have the potential to illuminate important issues related to language, identity, discrimination and digital communication, by supplying a basis to consider the ways in which the strategies used to perform linguistic aggression as impoliteness are similar to, or different from, those in other languages and cultures. Furthermore, the study of

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-37580943>;

² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268136/top-15-countries-based-on-number-of-facebook-users/>

such linguistic strategies is useful in showing that the participants' identity in such contexts is performed *vis-à-vis* the context in which they interact (GRAHAM; HARDAKER, 2017; PERELMUTTER, 2015). Rather than projecting static ideas of self, which could lead one to consider, for example, notions such as cordiality and conflict-avoidance as main characteristics of a given people, the study of aggression as impoliteness and identity points to the fluid construction, and performance of, identity as a set of situated actions in interaction (GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2013).

2 Impoliteness as aggression in digital communication

For the purposes of this article, impoliteness is understood as behavior that conveys a negative (impolite) attitude, breaking with conventional and culturally accepted norms of conduct (CULPEPER, 2011, 2014; PERELMUTTER, 2015; GRAHAM; HARDAKER, 2017) in the context of the interaction where it occurs (GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2013, BLITVICH, 2010). Notions of linguistic im/politeness in Brazil, and in Brazilian Portuguese, have often been crossed with variables such as age, class, level of education and/or relations of power (see KOIKE, 2014). In the specific case of impoliteness in digital communication, regardless of the language or culture in which it is expressed, it is necessary to take into account both its context-based nature, and how the participants' actions affect one another, or generate next responses (GRAHAM; HARDAKER, 2017, p. 786). The interpretation of any given utterance as inadequate, aggressive or impolite is, thus, assessed in the ongoing exchanges amongst the several participants. There are also specificities of computer mediated communication (CMC) which are unique to the medium, such as the ability to like or dislike a post, or to use emoticons to express how one feels about a previous statement (GRAHAM; HARDAKER, 2017; VANDERGRIFF, 2013). This context and participant-based interpretation of impoliteness highlights its evaluative essence (CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017; HAUGH, 2015; KÀDÁR, 2017). As the responses in the discussions under analysis are usually threaded, it is possible to follow the progression of any given line from its emission to the point where the participants perceive, evaluate, and react to it as an impolite action.

As Graham and Hardaker (2017, p. 786) show, the asynchronous nature of Facebook as a social media platform is one of the factors that make it more likely that a conflict will expand. This is so because the

platform allows multiple participants to join in the discussion at different times, creating chains of responses, which, at times, react not to the original triggering post on the Facebook page itself, but to comments added by the multiple participants, at different times. According to the authors, “any conflict, no matter how small, may expand and multiply if multiple participants join a discussion before the original poster becomes aware of and can explain/mitigate an act that is perceived as impolite (GRAHAM; HARDAKER, 2017, p. 787). In addition, the removal of face-to-face contact, or voice, limits the means of interpretation of a message. The participants of these interactions rely, mostly, on the written messages per se, or in the use of other typical digital communication resources, such as emoticons, exaggerated punctuation, or idiosyncratic orthography (MCCULLOCH, 2019).

There is, however, an expectation for the type of comments that should follow the narratives of discrimination (FLANNERY, 2008a, 2008b; GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2013; VAN DIJK, 1984) posted on the page under investigation, which can be accessed by considering the subsequent comments and others’ reactions. The participants of the page are members of a group that fights against discriminatory actions, and thus, the appropriate and expected responses for these stories would condemn such episodes and their purported perpetrators. The kinds of alignments that are performed during the interactions position the participants in two opposing groups, marking those who are for (or perhaps neutral) or against such discriminatory actions. These positions and alignments, in turn, contribute to inform the identity of the participants in the context of the interactions.

The next sections exemplify how such alignment is performed, and the kinds of resources that the participants employ to sanction and ratify each other’s rights vis-à-vis the interactional event. The assessments provided by the several participants in subsequent posts show varying degrees of aggression as impoliteness, which, in turn, enables them to establish who is an insider and who is an outsider, or antagonist, in the context of the post’s discussion. As previous studies have shown (KÁDÁR, 2017), impoliteness as aggression in discourse can fulfill a series of functions, such as reestablishing a moral order, and this repositioning appears to enable the participants to perform a similar action, as they assert or critique each other’s contribution, marking who is on their side, and who is not.

This paper aligns with other studies of impoliteness also by using an interdisciplinary approach, borrowing from interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and social pragmatics. It seeks to illustrate how a discussion about narratives of discrimination in the context of a Facebook page in Brazil generates impolite and aggressive responses, which, in turn, contribute to create local identities for the participants. It also makes a contribution to the studies of impoliteness in Brazilian Portuguese, highlighting linguistic means to perform aggression as impoliteness in the context of an instance of computer mediated communication.

3 Data and methodology

The excerpts analyzed in this article are illustrative of the types of linguistic aggression as impoliteness in the polylogous context (LORENZO-DUS; BLITVICH; BOU-FRANCH, 2011) where they originated, following two narratives of discrimination³ posted on the Facebook page. This data is part of a larger research project on language and discrimination in a Facebook discussion, which is comprised of seven narratives, collected in 2017. This Facebook page was created by students in a Brazilian institution of higher education as a way to bring attention to, and promote, a campaign against the type of class discrimination that the underprivileged students faced on campus in their day-to-day dealings with other students and faculty. The Facebook page presents the narratives as longer posts, and highlights the climax of the accounts, e.g., the discriminatory line uttered by the perpetrator of discrimination, through reported speech, an evaluation offered by the victim, stressing their perception of the event as discriminatory. These sections of the narrative are shown in white letters against a black background, and function as a call to the story. The content of these boxes is presented in the analytical section, and the language employed by the participants is maintained in its original form, including the idiosyncrasies in punctuation, spelling and/or unconventional orthography. In addition, following the original texts in Brazilian Portuguese, there is an English translation.

³ As the focus of this paper is on the discussions following the narratives, they are only paraphrased in the analytical section. The full text of the narratives of discrimination can be found in the appendix.

As some discussions have shown (GRAHAM; HARDAKER, 2017; LORENZO-DUS; BLITVICH; BOU-FRANCH, 2011; PERELMUTER, 2015) , while analyzing online text it is important to consider some categories of the participants' social identity as well as the nature of the site, i.e., whether it is private or public, and the type of communication being mediated, whether it is synchronous or asynchronous. The page under consideration is open to the public, and thus, visible to all, which means that an individual who contributes to this page is aware that their posts will be available to a larger audience. Despite the open nature of this page, destined as a campaign and as a tool to divulge information, to protect the identities of the contributors, their full names, which appear throughout the discussions, are omitted and only their initials are used in the analytical section. Additional contextualizing information, such as time or date of the postings, which could be used to identify their authors, was also removed to ensure privacy. Given the nature of pages like this one, where the social identity of the participants cannot be ascertained and confirmed (because the individuals have the ability to create virtual identities just for the sake of the interaction at stake) and of the medium itself, it is not possible to pinpoint contextual information such as their age group, location, or class identity. As Lorenzo-Dus, Blitvich and Bou-Franch (2011, p. 2581) discuss, "participants' identities in deindividuated, on-line contexts are mostly constructed in terms of their belonging to one or more social categories or groups." Thus, the face threats in such contexts are not necessarily directed at the participants themselves, but, rather, to the larger groups with which they choose to identify. In the case of the page, both its creators and target audience self-identify as university students, promoting a cause that is directly connected to a perceived problem in the institution that they attend, or have attended. The groups with which the participants identify in these interactions are pro and against the cases defended by the page, as outlined in its objectives.

The instances of aggression as impoliteness that were identified in the interactions analyzed were 1) direct disagreement – an interactant openly expresses a different point of view or idea, 2) confrontation – an interactant challenges another's position(s), and 3) name-calling – an interactant expresses a negative view of the other by means of a derogatory label, i.e., vulgar or stereotypical terms (CULPEPER, 2011; LORENZO-DUS; BLITVICH; BOU-FRANCH, 2011). The excerpts

chosen for this qualitative analysis illustrate these features in the context of these discussions. As the participants take sides for or against the positions espoused in the stories, or show solidarity toward one another, or the victim of discrimination in the narratives, they employ strategies that can be interpreted within the interactions as instances of impoliteness as aggression. This perception of a post as an occurrence of impoliteness is viewed here as a function of the reactions, as comments and/or subsequent aggression, that follows. Indeed, it is possible to assert that the cases of discrimination under discussion are, themselves, examples of impoliteness as aggression. This is in line with other perspectives for the study of impoliteness, according to which for “an item to be charged as impolite, it must be challenged” (CULPEPER; HARDAKER, 2017, p. 211). In both narratives, the discriminatory offenses consist of the attribution of a negative trait, i.e., negative association, by the perpetrator to the victim, which are disputed both inside and outside of the story-world. Thus, when the participants react to the stories, they are already effectively exposing their evaluations of an action, which was already considered aggressive, impolite.

4 Reacting to discrimination: impoliteness as aggression and identity

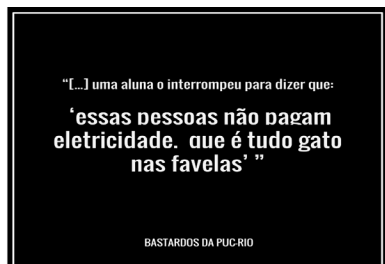
The three interactional sequences analyzed in this section consist of reactions to two narratives of discrimination posted to the page, or to the comments that follow these posts. One of the strategies employed by the participants was open disagreement with a statement made in a previous post. In such cases, the authors of the posts expressing disagreement formulated a response that openly challenged the assumptions of veracity in the statements with which they disagree. Given that, in Brazil, open disagreements can be considered rude, (see KOIKE, 2014) and indirectness is preferred, such obvious manifestations of impoliteness can be considered aggressive.

The first sequence emerged after a narrative in which a university’s alumnus recounted an experience detailing how a professor, in class, provided a few examples of the kinds of expenses that an average middle-class Brazilian family usually has. While describing such expenses, the professor was interrupted by a student, who added that, in the shantytowns, or *favelas*, people could only access electric energy illegally. The student’s statement was interpreted as prejudicial, because it clearly drew on well-

known stereotypes of the country's poor communities' inhabitants, i.e., they lack resources to pay bills, while living illegally in land owned by others, and use public resources without paying for them, effectively stealing from the government. The highlighted lines in the black box are a typical resource of the page, to emphasize what is considered discriminatory, in this case, the student's statement, in reported speech, and which represents the climax of the story.

Impoliteness is also an index of identity construction in these examples (BLITVICH; SIFIANOU, 2017, p. 239), because it enables 1) those who are against the discriminatory action to show solidarity toward the victim, and 2) those who may question the veracity of the accounts to align against the victims and/or the ideals of the page (UPADHYAY, 2010).

Ex.1: Indirect disagreement



Translation: “[...] a student interrupted him to say that:

‘these people don’t pay for electricity. That everything is illegal in the shantytowns’”

Facebook dialogue:

DNP E se fosse gato, da pra pagar luz com salário mínimo e morando de aluguel?

And if it were illegal, is it possible to pay with minimum wages and paying rent?

Pra esse pessoal é mais digno morar na rua? deve ser

For these people is it more dignifying to live in the street? It must be.

In the first line of the response, the use of impoliteness by DPN (the Facebook participant) as direct disagreement challenges the rationale offered by the perpetrator of discrimination in the story being referenced in this discussion to justify the supposedly dishonest conduct of individuals from the periphery, undermining the offered assumption as a reason for the illegal access to public resources. This is accomplished

as DNP elaborates his response with a question in the conditional (“*And if it were illegal, is it possible to pay with minimum wages and paying rent?*”), which anticipates a negative answer, and thus, challenges the validity in the accusation made by the perpetrator of discrimination. DNP’s response also suggests that individuals from the shantytowns who are accused by the student perpetrator of discrimination of stealing public energy are victimized by a system that overburdens them, considering that, with their “minimum wages” and expenses such as “rent”, it would not be possible to pay the government for access to electricity.

As DNP further elaborates on his response, another example of aggressive language is put forth, also by means of a question (“*For these people is it more dignifying to live on the streets?*”). As with the first part of the excerpt (or the first question), the implied response to the proposed question here negates the validity of the assumption offered by the perpetrator of discrimination in the story being discussed. It also has the function of highlighting an unwanted, or negative, characteristic attributed to the student, contributing for her portrayal as unkind, ungenerous, and unreasonable, since it is assumed (“*It should be.*”) that she would prefer for the shantytown dwellers to live on the streets, rather than for them to have illegal, or any access thereof, to energy.

Notice, also the US X THEM (VAN DIJK, 2006, p. 126) positioning created as DNP refers to the perpetrator of discrimination in the story world with “these people” (VAN DIJK, 1984, p. 81). This reference establishes adversarial identities, suggesting that the student who uttered the discriminatory offense in the story-world is representative of a larger group, beyond the limits of the event described. The aggressive use of language in this response thus corroborates Blitvich and Sifianou (2017, p. 241), according to whom similar linguistic manifestations are “[h]ighly functional and ideologically loaded.”

Impoliteness as aggression in direct disagreement is also employed in these discussions to ratify participation and mark different degrees of affiliation with the ideals expressed on the page’s objectives and posts,⁴ which, in essence, is to “bring awareness to readers” and

⁴ The page objectives: “Our main objective is to bring awareness to readers, by means of accounts, about the reality of exclusion and social dichotomy in which the scholarship recipients/from the periphery of the University are inserted. We also want to create a strengthening and empowering network for scholarship recipients and peripheral [students], increasing ever more the members of the group Periféricxs [...]”

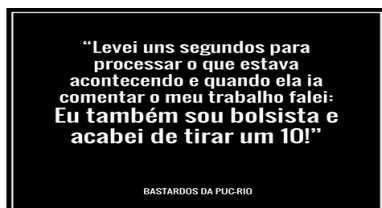
to align against the type of discrimination experienced (“to create a strengthening and empowering network”).

In the next sequence, the participants of the discussion react to a story describing the experience of a student who overheard her professor make a prejudicial comment, in an undertone, about another student asking for a paper’s deadline extension. The professor’s negative comment in reaction to the student’s request suggested that she could only be one of the recipients of the government’s educational incentives to underprivileged communities. This comment seems to imply that the requesting student 1) was attempting to obtain special treatment, or 2) didn’t perform in par with the colleagues who turned the paper on the established deadline. Upon hearing the professor’s ruminations about the requesting student, the student-narrator informs her of also being one of such underprivileged students, but having just earned the highest mark in her exam, a clear contrast with (and a challenge to) the prejudicial assumptions exposed in the professor’s utterance.

The ensuing discussion includes readers’ reactions to this story and exemplifies how impoliteness as aggression is used to build participants’ identities locally, as in and outside group members, depending on the perceived degree to which they align against, or show solidarity toward, the post’s author. More specifically, impoliteness as aggression indexes identity in these cases, helping to establish 1) who is perceived to occupy the positions of antagonist, and 2) who aligns with and shows solidarity toward the post’s author.

The next image shows a highlight of the story to which the next Facebook excerpt analyzed in this sequence reacts.

Ex. 02: identity and solidarity



Translation: “It took me a few seconds to process what was happening and when she was going to comment on my paper, I said: I am also a scholarship recipient and I have just earned a 100%.”

Facebook dialogue:

EG *Aí gente, vcs só reclamam*

Come on everyone, all you do is complain.

ER *É serio isso?*

Is this serious?

CM *A reclamação que estou vendo aqui é sua E. Além do mais, alguém de obrigou a estar aqui?*

The [only] complaint that I am seeing here is yours, E. Besides, did anyone obligated you to be here?

CS *não é possível... só pode ser sarcasmo.. e mesmo que seja, uma página dessa não é pra receber esse tipo de comentário. fala sério..*

This is not possible... it can only be sarcasm.... and even if it is, a page like this is not meant to receive these kinds of comments. Come on.

Impoliteness is employed in the first reaction to the narrative, as EG asserts that the participants of the page are complainers, employing a vocative in Brazilian Portuguese that conveys a tone of impatience (“*Aí gente*”/ *Come on everyone*). The subsequent responses to EG’s post address the negative instance that his comment takes toward the story and the participants collective identity, by questioning its acceptability as a truthful statement. EG’s comment on Facebook is evaluated by the participants as inadequate, and, in this context, an impolite reaction to the narrative just told. As the participants address EG’s comment, they employ varying degrees of aggression, which also enables them to collectively attribute the position of antagonist to him. As the participants ER, CM and CS react to EG’s comment, they question the appropriateness of his response and his participation by targeting 1) the truth value of EG’s proposition itself (“*Is this serious?*”), 2) the content of his message (“*The only complaint that I am seeing here is yours*”), 3) his participation in the page’s discussion (“*Did anyone obligated you to be here?*”), and 4) by identifying his participation as inappropriate, thus excluding him as a ratified member to their community of practice (“*a page like this is not meant to receive these kinds of comments*”).

Despite the sequence of comments that collectively identify EG as an unwelcome participant in the discussion, and the antagonist, he reiterates his opinion (and position) about the story and, by extension, the community created through the page, with another impolite, aggressive comment, this time directly attacking the validity of the posted accounts

of discrimination, and their narrators perspectives. This is exemplified in the next sequence, which continues the interaction.

Ex. 3: direct disagreement

Facebook dialogue:

EG Adoram se fazer de vítima, meu dels do céu, por isto que as coisas não melhoram... Chega de mimimi

You love to victimize yourselves, my God, that's why things don't improve...

Enough with the whining

JL Só entende o que é preconceito quem já sofreu.

The only [people] who understand what prejudice is are those who have suffered it.

AR fácil falar quando vc não sofre na pele, né querido. Vamos ter empatia ao invés de chamar de mimimi?

[It's] easy to talk when you didn't suffer it in your own skin, right darling.

Let's have more empathy instead of calling it whining?

AC Também é por causa de gente como você, EG, que páginas como essa precisam existir!

It is also because of people like you, EG, that pages like this one need to exist!



In the previous sequence, EG's aggression is expressed with the reiteration of his initial position, which questions the merit of the posts reporting episodes of discrimination. This time, however, he 1) more directly accuses the participants of victimization (“*You love to victimize yourselves*”), while also 2) suggesting that they are responsible for their own difficulties and the status quo (“*my God, that's why things don't improve*”), and 3) concluding with a directive, which further enhances his

perspective about the participants as complainers, or whiners (*“Enough with the whining”*). The negative associations contained in EG’s reaction also reinforce a sense of us X them, which is marked by the use of the collective pronoun (Vocês/you) in the opening of his response. Further, EG employs a word that has surfaced frequently in recent online discussions in Brazil to characterize the supposedly oversensitive posture of the left (*“mimimi”*). The use of this word also confronts the motives of the participants who believe that they have been victimized by prejudice on campus, since it implies, as EG has confirmed thus far, that the students are exaggerating on their reactions to the episodes described.

This sequence of comments by EG spurs another chain of comments by means of which the participants align against him. While employing aggression and impoliteness to address EG’s accusation of whining, and improper conduct in the context of the activities being developed, the members of this community of practice reinforce the page’s goal to evoke sympathy with, and show solidarity toward, victims of discrimination on campus. This is accomplished as the participants, JL, AR and AC question the validity of the assumptions offered by EG regarding the self-identified victims of discrimination. JL implies that EG is not empathetic while directly asserting that, to understand prejudice, one needs to have “suffered it”, which is reaffirmed, through repetition in the next comment by AR (*“it’s easy to talk when you didn’t suffer it, right darling”*). Two points merit consideration in this sequence 1) the use of a discourse marker of confirmation (SCHIFFRIN, 1987) and an endearing term (*“right darling”*), but understood here as a sarcastic expression of false sympathy, in the structural construction of this aggressive response; and 2) the use of a question that surmises EG’s position as non-empathetic, at the same time that it shames him for exposing an opinion contrary to the one shared by the community of practice at play (PERELMUTTER, 2015, p. 170). AR also adds to EG’s face shaming by reinstating the purpose of the page and similar ones (*“It’s because of people like you, EG, that pages like this one need to exist!”*), using him as an example.

At the end of his comment, AR adds a cartoon, which references the famous line by Martin Luther King Junior (*“I have a dream”*), and indirectly identifies EG as a racist, as the cartoon purportedly represents a time travel by an “average Brazilian” who utters, after hearing the well-known anti-racist line, the word “whining” (*“mimimi”*). Interestingly,

in reacting to EG's comment, the subsequent contributors make use of the same term that he used to insult their position ("*mimimi*"), creating another context in which it acquires a different, negative meaning, this time directed at him. The use of this word in the fictitious scene created in the cartoon also enhances the sense of us X them, while symbolically attributing to EG the position of perpetrator of discrimination. These actions, taken in sequence by those participating in the discussion, reposition the interactants, assigning places as insiders and outsiders. Additionally, this repositioning, enacted by means of impolite, aggressive language, also contributes to the reestablishment of a moral order (KADAR, 2017), since it is possible to interpret EG's interference as a kind a "heckling", which disturbs the development of the actions expected, or sanctioned, in the interactional event at play.

Another resource employed by the participants to signal that EG's response had been inadequate, or impolite, for the context, was name calling, in a sort of tit-for-tat, as exemplified in the sequence below:

Ex. 4: name calling

Facebook dialogue:

IIF EG babaca

EG idiot

EG Vcs só querem bolsa

All you want is the scholarship

AA Que pena de gente como esse E, cara.

Velho, melhor ficar calado do que falar merda, de coração.

I feel sorry for people like this E, man.

Bro, [it's] better to keep quiet than to say shit, from [the bottom of my] heart.

In assessing EG's comments and respective position in relation to the story of discrimination told, considered by most of the participants as impolite and aggressive, IFF resorts to name calling ("*babaca*" / "*idiot*"), which is the most directly aggressive strategy used thus far. This seems to have had the effect of escalating the level of impoliteness in the discussion, as the following comments also contain more direct and aggressive language, both in EG's own reaction, which is an accusation and/or bad association ("*All you want is the scholarship*"), and in the assessment of his conduct by other participants, such as AA, who also employs a vulgar term ("*better to keep quiet than to say shit*").

Interestingly, while reacting to EG's comment, considered inappropriate in the context of this discussion for attacking the intentions of the storytellers and post discussants, IFF and AA escalate the argument, by employing more direct strategies of impoliteness, in the form of insults and name calling. These reactions confirm that there are types of responses, which are expected as contributions to this page, and that deviations from the appropriate conduct, expressed in form of agreement or disagreement with the positions of the victims in the story-world, warrant different levels of impolite responses.

5 Discussion: impoliteness, aggression and discriminatory discourse in digital communication in Brazil

In previous studies (KOIKE, 2014), degrees of polite/impolite strategies in Brazilian Portuguese in face-to-face interactions are frequently interpreted against a contextual background, encompassing age, level of education, and the degree to which the participants of a given interaction know each other. According to this perspective, whereas speakers tend to be more direct when addressing those they know, differences in relative power, age and education usually incur in more indirectness. However, in the context of the online discussions analyzed in this article, from a public Facebook page, open to individuals who may or may not know one another, impoliteness strategies were geared both toward the content of the accounts and their tellers themselves, on the one hand, and to those who figured in the story-world as perpetrators of the discriminatory action and participants who disagreed, on the other. The degree to which the participants of this discussion adhere to the ideals of the page, i.e., to promote a discussion about episodes of class discrimination on their university campus, can be apprehended by observing their reactions put forth through different impoliteness strategies. Thus, it is not the case that the *a priori* identity characteristics of the interactants influence their impoliteness/politeness strategies, but, rather, that the degree to which they employ such strategies indicates the groups with which they effectively identify.

By ignoring this insight, one would think that the use of aggressive and impolite language online in Brazil contradicts the very essence of a Brazilian national identity, whose main stereotype was, for a long time, that of a harmonious, cordial people, open to, and embracing

of, the other. However, the current politically and ideologically polarized climate in Brazil (SCHWARCZ, 2019), reflected in discussions such as the ones analyzed in this article, and the language used in these contexts, show that there is more at play, and, thus, deserve more attention, as they become more and more ubiquitous in online interactions. As the analysis presented in this article illustrates, the study of these impoliteness strategies and aggressive language must be observed by considering a fluid, rather than static, understanding of identity, marking a shift “away from essentialist views” to a “discursive and interactional” approach (GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2013, p. 56).

Impoliteness as aggression emerged in the interactions in the page while the participants reacted to narratives of discrimination, 1) supplying their opinions about the discriminatory actions portrayed in the story-world, 2) agreeing or disagreeing with the accounts in the narratives, or/and with one another, and 3) disputing their veracity. Whilst the participants reacted to the narratives in a group discussion, the categories of in and out-group affiliations are ratified, and instances of impoliteness as aggression index such identity status within the ongoing interactions.

The analysis of these interactional sequences in this article revealed that participants employed different strategies of impoliteness both 1) to position themselves for or against the discriminatory actions in the story-world, and, simultaneously 2) to establish different categories of (dis)affiliation with the purposes espoused in this community of practice. The interpretation of these strategies as instances of impoliteness as aggression is context-based, deriving from the observation of next responses and reactions to the subsequent threads.

The analysis also shows that the participants sanction the use of impoliteness depending on how it agrees or disagrees with their views regarding discriminatory actions directed at the students and described in the narratives.

6 Conclusion and directions for future research

This article exemplifies the use of aggression as impoliteness in digital communication in Brazilian Portuguese and the performance of such linguistic actions in a discussion about class discrimination in a Facebook page. Impoliteness fulfills specific functions and ratifies different positions in the context of the discussion. For example, although

those disagreeing with or criticizing the stories of discrimination or their narrators are perceived as acting inappropriately, the participants who defend against, and show a different position from the antagonists are sanctioned to use some degree of impoliteness. Linguistic impoliteness as aggression was manifested through overt disagreement, name calling, confrontation and sarcasm (LORENZO-DUS; BLITVICH; BOUFRANCH, 2011) to communicate different opinions about, or argue against, the perceived instances of discrimination supplied in the students' campaign, and subsequently discussed on the participants' posts. This strategic use of impoliteness contributes to create positions and ratify identities in the context of the discussion, marking in and outside group members, as the participants: 1) align against, or 2) justify the behaviors described in the narratives of discrimination under consideration.

Given the widespread use of digital communication through social media in Brazil and the prevailing divisiveness that marks its current public discourse, studies of impoliteness as aggression can be fruitful in indicating how long-standing norms of politeness have been undercut (KOIKE, 2014). Such studies could illuminate other questions regarding linguistic and social norms in their relationship with digital communication. For instance, as individuals make ever more use of digital communication tools, is it expected that the manner by which agreement, disagreement and (im)politeness is performed across language and cultures will be more homogeneous? Because language understanding is indissociable from observing the context whence it originates, this apparent contrast with longstanding social norms of (im)politeness raises pertinent questions, given the prevalence of digital communication and the use of social media in societies like Brazil.

More studies can investigate impoliteness as aggression in different types of social media and/or interactions, trying to tease out whether such strategies appear more often in politically oriented or ideologically oriented sites, such as the Facebook page, or whether they are also common in other media. The kinds of linguistic and paralinguistic resources employed while the participants perform impoliteness as aggression can also be a fruitful site to investigate.

References

BLITVICH, P. A Genre Approach to the Study of Im-politeness. *International Review of Pragmatics*, [S.l.], v. 2, n. 1, p. 46-94, 2010. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/187731010X491747>

BLITVICH, P.; SIFIANOU, M. (Im)politeness and Identity. In: CULPEPER, J.; HAUGH, M.; KÁDAR, D. Z. (org.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)politeness*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. p. 227-256. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-37508-7_10

CULPEPER, J. D. Epilogue: The “How” and the “What” of (Im) politeness. In: TERKOURAFI, M. (org.). *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Im/politeness*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: Johns Benjamins, 2014. p. 267-275. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/aals.14.13cul>

CULPEPER, J. D. *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511975752>

CULPEPER, J. D.; HARDAKER, C. Impoliteness. In: CULPEPER, J.; HAUGH, M.; KÁDAR, D. Z. (org.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)politeness*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. p. 199-225. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-37508-7_9

FLANNERY, M. R. S. “Nós” versus “eles”: discurso discriminatório, preconceito e linguagem agressiva na comunicação digital no Brasil.” (In press).

FLANNERY, M. R. S. Language, Stigma and Identity: An Analysis of the Narrative Discourse of Racial Discrimination. *Luso-Brazilian Review*, Madison, WI, v. 45, n. 2, p. 154-176, 2008a. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lbr.0.0040>

FLANNERY, M. R. S. She Discriminated Against Her Own Race: Voicing and Identity in a Story of Discrimination. *Narrative Inquiry*, [S.l.], v. 18, n. 1, p. 111-130, 2008b. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.18.1.06fla>

FLANNERY, M. R. S. Triste realidade: construindo solidariedade em reação à discriminação racial no Facebook. *Revista Entrelinhas*, São Leopoldo, RS, v. 11, n. 2, p. 285-300, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4013/entr.2017.11.2.08>

- FLANNERY, M. R. S. *Uma introdução à análise da narrativa oral*. São Paulo: Pontes Editores, 2015.
- GEORGAKOPOULOU, A. Small Stories and Identities Analysis as a Framework for the Study of Im/politeness-in-Interaction. *Journal of Politeness Research*, [S.l.], v. 9, n. 1, p. 55-74. 2013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2013-0003>
- GOFFMAN, E. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.
- GRAHAM, S. L., HARDAKER, C. (Im)politeness in Digital Communication. In: CULPEPER, J.; HAUGH, M.; KÁDAR, D. Z. (org.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)politeness*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. p. 785-814. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-37508-7_30
- HAUGH, M. *Im/politeness Implicatures*. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110240078>
- HOLANDA, S. B. de. *Raízes do Brasil*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995.
- KÁDÁR, D. Z. *Politeness, Impoliteness and Ritual: Maintaining the Moral Order in Interpersonal Interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107280465>
- KOIKE, D. A. *Language and Social Relationships in Brazilian Portuguese. The Pragmatics of Politeness*. Austin: University of Texas, 2014.
- LEECH, G. N. *The Pragmatics of Politeness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195341386.001.0001>
- LORENZO-DUS, N.; BLITVICH, G. P.; BOU-FRANCH, P. On-line Polylogues and Impoliteness: the Case of Postings Sent in Response to Obama Reggaeton YouTube video. *Journal of Pragmatics*, [S.l.], v. 43, n. 10, p. 2578-2593. 2011. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2011.03.005>
- MCCULLOCH, G. *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2019.

PERELMUTTER, R. Shaming, Group Face, and Identity Construction in a Russian Virtual Community for Women. In: TERKOURAFI, M. (org.). *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Im/politeness*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: Johns Benjamins, 2015. p. 149-180. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/aals.14.08per>

SCHIFFRIN, D. *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611841>

SCHWARCZ, L. *Sobre o autoritarismo brasileiro*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019.

UPADHYAY, S. R. Identity and Impoliteness in Computer-Mediated Reader Responses. *Journal of Politeness Research*, [S.l.], v. 6, p. 105-127. 2010. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2010.006>

VAN DIJK, T. A. Ideology and Discourse Analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, [S.l.], v. 11, n. 2, p. 115-140. 2006. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600687908>

VAN DIJK, T. A. *Prejudice in Discourse: An Analysis of Ethnic Prejudice in Cognition and Conversation*. Amsterdam: Johns Benjamins Publishing, 1984. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/pb.v.3>

VANDERGRIFF, I. Emotive Communication Online: A Contextual Analysis of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) Cues. *Journal of Pragmatics*, [S.l.], v. 51, p. 1-12, 20013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.02.008>

APPENDIX

Narrative 1

“Entrei na [Universidade] em 2008, mas em 2010 mudei de curso para administração. Em um curso, não lembro qual, um professor estava explicando porquê do salário mínimo ser considerado tão ruim. Ele fez uma simulação de contas que as pessoas normalmente pagam com seus salários por exemplo aluguel e fatura de eletricidade, uma aluna o interrompeu para dizer que “essas pessoas não pagam eletricidade, que é tudo gato nas favelas”, ninguém a contestou, nem eu que nunca tive gato em casa.”

I entered [University] in 2008, but in 2010 I switched courses to business administration. In a class, I don't remember which one, a professor was explaining why the minimum wage is considered so bad. He did a simulation of bills that people usually pay with their salaries, for example rent and the electricity bill, a student interrupted him to say that “these people don't pay for electricity, that it's all illegal wirings in the shantytowns,” nobody challenged her, not even I who never had illegal wirings at home.’

Narrative 2

“Durante os anos da graduação em Design, eu como bolsista do Prouni acabei colecionando falas e situações desconfortáveis e desmotivadoras. A primeira que percebi foi no terceiro período no dia da entrega da g2. A segunda avaliação do semestre aconteceu em forma de trabalho. Os alunos iam um por um até a mesa da professora em questão buscar seus trabalhos, saber a nota, ouvir os comentários e eram liberados. Fiquei por último porque ela tinha uma dúvida sobre o meu trabalho. Abri o arquivo no computador, ganhei meu 10 e quando ela ia fazer os comentários entrou uma outra aluna na sala. Meio desesperada pediu licença e perguntou se tinha alguma outra data para ela entregar a g2. Não prestei atenção na conversa pq queria ser liberada logo, afinal se eu corresse talvez conseguisse chegar na minha casa em XXXXX sem pegar engarrafamento. A menina foi embora e voltei a prestar atenção ao que acontecia na sala. Foi quando ouvi um: “só podia ser bolsista!” Levei uns segundos para processar o que estava acontecendo e quando ela ia comentar o meu trabalho falei, -Eu também sou bolsista e acabei de tirar um 10!

During the undergraduate years in Design, I as a scholarship recipient of Prouni [a government program that sponsors underprivileged students], ended up collecting uncomfortable and discouraging speeches and situations. The first one that I noticed happened in my third semester on the day to turn the g2 [work for grade]. The second

evaluation of the semester was a paper. The students went one by one to the professor's table to gather their paper, to find out their grades, listen to the comments and they were dismissed. I was the last one because she had a question about my paper. I opened the document in the computer, got my 10 [highest grade] and when she was going to make comments another student came into the classroom. A little desperate she excused herself and asked whether there would be another date to turn in the g2. I didn't pay attention to the conversation because I wanted to be dismissed quickly, after all, if I ran perhaps I could get home in XXXXX [in the periphery and far away from the university] without hitting traffic. The girl left and I started to pay attention to what was happening in the classroom. It was then that I heard a "it could only be a scholarship recipient!" It took me a few seconds to process what was happening and when she was going to comment my paper I said, - I am also a scholarship recipient and I just receive a 10 [100%]!