

# THE PANDEMIC IN THE BRAZILIAN AND ITALIAN MEDIA: REFERENCING AND ARGUMENTATIVE POSITIONING

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The pandemic scenario we live in has put the whole world on alert about the main prevention measures against the coronavirus, and about the search for effective means to combat the Covid-19's advance. The consequences of the pandemic have been highlighted in mass media, in Brazil and in other countries. It is notorious, though, the variety of argumentative positioning and of emphasis, comparing to different media and considering the same news story. In this context, we aim to analyze, in this chapter, two news about the 500,000 Covid-19 deaths mark in Brazil: one published online in the Brazilian newspaper *O Globo*, on June 20, 2021, and another published in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, on June 21 of that same year. Our goal is not to make generalizations about the strategies used or about the choices made by the selected media. We aim to outline a qualitative

analysis to exemplify how the referencing, in these two papers, helps to reveal different argumentative perspectives in relation to the reported fact.

For this analysis, we selected a discourse object (DO) from the Brazilian newspaper – “mistakes of the Bolsonaro government” – and two DOs from the Italian newspaper – “China” and “Brazil”. We intend to verify, from a socio-cognitive and interactional conception of language, how these DOs are (re)constructed throughout the texts, as well as their contribution to argumentative direction of meaning (MONDADA; DUBOIS; 2003; KOCH, 2001). We also seek to observe the role of textual clues as an important recategorization strategy of DO and the intersection sets from the relationship between referential processes, creating new referential chains. Hence, we intend to show a more complex relationship of the role of referential processes, which can be combined or even argumentatively overlapped throughout the text.

Although journalistic writing manuals defend that the formal configuration of the news textual genre should prioritize objectivity and accuracy, we agree with Santos (2015, p.6) that “impartiality in language is a myth, an illusion”. Thus, we reiterate the concept of language as a form of action, which considers the interactive relationship of interlocutors in a communicative event (JUBRAN, 2003).

First of all, we adopt the current conception of Text Linguistics (TL) regarding the concept of text. According to Marcuschi (2008, p. 72), “we talk about text as an event that updates meanings and not as an entity that carries meanings regardless of its readers”. This means that the text represents the place to which a series of cognitive-discursive activities converge (KOCH, 2003; MARCUSCHI, 2008), that is, the world knowledge of the subjects involved in the process, their communicative practices, their culture, their history, will be responsible for the production of meanings. Hence, when we read or produce a text, we activate prior knowledge that helps us in the construction of meaning and that can be linguistic, encyclopedic and interactional in nature.

From this perspective, Koch and Elias (2008) state that, for the comprehension of the text, the author-text-reader interaction is essential, since the role of the reader starts to have a great prominence as an active subject in this dialogical construction process of the senses. Therefore, we talk about sharing knowledge when we talk about reading and making sense.

Based on the concepts adopted by Text Linguistics (TL) that the text does not represent a simple joining of sentences or just an information exchange, but a complex system for the elaboration of meanings, we situate referencing as an important textual-discursive phenomenon for production/construction of meanings

in the text. More specifically, referencing acts in the construction and reconstruction of discourse objects (DOs) or referents, which, in essence, are elements that represent in the interlocutors' minds an established entity, constructed discursively (CAVALCANTE; CUSTÓDIO FILHO; BRITO, 2014). In this sense, referential expressions are linguistic structures responsible for referring to the DO, and they are in constant transformation by the subjects involved in the interaction due to a project of saying.

In this referencing process, the DOs, throughout the text, can be constructed, reconstructed, activated, deactivated and recategorized, through linguistic-textual strategies that are never random, since, according to Santos (2015, p. 6), "there is no neutral sign, there is no totally objective language, free from positioning". In this sense, corroborating the dynamic character of meaning construction and reconstruction in the text, Mondada and Dubois (2003), Koch and Elias (2008), Cavalcante (2012), Santos (2015), among other authors, argue that the act of referring does not represent a mere pointing, a simple equivalence relation between terms in the text or even a direct connection between words and things. According to the authors, the process is much more complex and dynamic, as it involves intense negotiation between the social actors involved in the interaction - which implies that the DOs are (re)constructed within the text to meet an interactional demand of the subjects, according to the project of saying. Therefore, in this chapter, in addition to prioritizing the analysis of anaphoric referential processes in Brazilian and Italian news, we also highlight the role of textual clues that promote a "seam" throughout the text, outlining its argumentative construction. After all, it is important to analyze not only referential strategies, but also the phenomenon as a whole, linked to the recognition of referential chains, highlighting a series of textual and discursive aspects involved in the construction of text meaning.

In our analysis, we sought to highlight the role of textual clues as an important strategy for re-categorizing DO. Classical studies on referencing do not usually consider the importance of this linguistic resource, as they prefer to analyze a specific discourse object and its referential chain using only anaphoras. However, we try to demonstrate that, throughout the text, the DOs are solidarized, in order to form a significant unity, through a "trail" of textual clues that argumentatively guide the meaning of the text. Thus, we are not concerned only with verifying the referential strategies used in the referential chain of a given discourse object or with identifying the presence/absence of co-referentiality of anaphoras (SEARA; SANTOS, 2019). Yet, we intend to expand the analysis, seeking to observe the

textual clues and the recategorizations carried out by them, to compose the referential chain.

Thus, in the case of the newspaper *O Globo*, if we only observed the referential chain of “ineffective medicines”, built by successive direct anaphors (DA), throughout the news, we would be limiting the argumentative potential of these referential expressions. In other words, although DA undergo transformations through its determinants, such as “drugs without efficacy”, “drugs without scientific proof”, the other textual clues contribute decisively to the cognitive recategorization of this referent. In this way, verbs, predications, and other information, participate in the (re)construction of the referent “medicines”. Hence, signs such as “it had no significant effects and could even be harmful” and “was bet” not only reveal the lack of credibility of this drug, but also this same characteristic extends to the Brazilian president, as he is the main defender of the drug. From this perspective, we seek to highlight the relationship between the DO, the referential strategies and the other linguistic-textual marks that come together to compose the textual architecture and the argumentative construction of meaning.

Similarly, in the newspaper *La Repubblica*, textual clues also participate in this argumentative game and guide the text meaning. It is interesting to note that, when highlighting the positive aspects of China (DO that appears repeated several times in the news), through textual signs, such as “in the last 24 hours only 23 cases” and “has the goal of vaccinating with two doses 40% of its population by the end of June”, the news implicitly refers to Brazil, due to the China x Brazil polarization already pointed out in the headline. As pandemic data have been widely disseminated, it is possible that a reader could make a comparison between the number of daily cases in China and those in Brazil, even if this information is not explicit in the news.

In addition, while *O Globo* ends the news pointing out President Bolsonaro’s silence in the face of the 500,000 death mark, *La Repubblica* highlights the voice of thousands of people who took it to the streets and protested, demanding the president’s impeachment. It is also interesting to note that, at the end of the Italian article, from the referential chain of the DO “Brazil” a new chain is inaugurated with the DO “the president”, an indirect anaphor of “Brazil” which, accompanied by new information, recategorizes both the DO.

From the analysis carried out, we verified that each newspaper highlighted a different aspect on the same prism of the 500,000 deaths mark due to covid in Brazil. The Brazilian newspaper highlighted the bet on medicines without proven efficacy as one of the main problems faced by Brazil in the fight against Covid,

listing this and two other “mistakes by the Bolsonaro government”. The Italian newspaper, in turn, highlighted, through a game of opposition between China and Brazil, positive aspects of China regarding the fight against the disease, attributing to Brazil, explicitly or implicitly, the failure to control the pandemic, especially emphasizing vaccination.

In light of the above, we sought to highlight that referential processes should not be analyzed independently of textual clues, as is generally the case in studies of the area. Previously, it was believed that the main transformations of referents occurred mostly through referential expressions. Currently, the aim is to analyze the text as a whole, associating the analysis of referencing really as a socio-cognitive and interactional process, which is associated with numerous elements in the textual configuration.

Thus, we notice that highly complex referential chains are formed in the analyzed news. These chains not only go beyond the role of retrieving, reiterating or anticipating information, but also contribute to the argumentative direction of the text, both through referential expressions with a more explicit axiological load and through the various textual clues scattered throughout the text.

The analysis that we carry out in this chapter is just a sample of the plurality of possible readings in texts that circulate in our daily lives. Additionally, the reasoning throughout the article also addresses a sample of the complex network, built in the analyzed texts through referencing. Therefore, it is clear that referencing is an expanding field of research, with several biases to be unveiled – a journey to which we invite readers on.

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