

Who Refused to Downplay Pandemic” (Apr. 16, 2020), introduces a key social actor to the discourse: Luiz Henrique Mandetta, the health minister. In H3, we observed seven occurrences of positive judgment towards Mandetta’s behavior. He is portrayed as “sober and serious,” as “a leader of the more reasoned group of Brazilian officials and politicians” in office, and as an experienced professional, who is frustrated by failed attempts at warning the government that the worst was yet to come. These choices are in sharp contrast to those regarding Bolsonaro and the Brazilian government, for which negative judgment is highly recurrent and inscribed. In describing Mandetta’s appointment as “one of the few [...] relatively sensible and credible,” H3 implies that the majority of other appointments were the opposite. Mandetta is described as “experienced” and not “an enemy of science or basic reason”- “[u]nlike many of Bolsonaro’s louder and more prominent picks.”

Besides the conventional “far-right” classification, Bolsonaro is depicted as a denier of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as an intolerant and incompetent ruler. Judgment towards the government in general is inscribed and just as negative, with mentions of “incompetence,” “empty bravado,” and “controversial, conspiratorial and rabidly conservative members.”

Finally, positive judgment towards Brazil deviates slightly from the trend previously mentioned: not only the country’s size is mentioned, but also its people’s pro-science attitude in terms of willingness to follow social distancing during the pandemic (“positive response to Mandetta’s handling of the crisis”; “a majority [of Brazilians] said they would follow social distancing guidelines”). The instances of negative judgment observed around the social actor “Brazil,” were interpreted as invoked negative judgment towards Bolsonaro and his administration (“Brazil [under Bolsonaro] is the only country in the world where the Minister of Health will fall for having decided to fight the Coronavirus”; “Brazil had already plagued itself with [Bolsonaro], an incapable and incompetent president”).

Proposal for Classroom Application

In this section, we outline general suggestions of pedagogical activities that could be included in EAL teaching plans, using news articles aimed at the high school students. Although we take the Brazilian context as our reference, we believe the suggestions may be adaptable to other cultural contexts.

Initially, teachers could expose their students to some of the foreign journalistic production about their country by bringing news headlines to the classroom. Those headlines should be from different news sources, but address the same issues. Students could be grouped into pairs or trios, with each group being given two headlines about the same issue. Groups could be asked to identify, at first, adjectives judging behavior, saying whether the judgment is positive or negative, and why they think that judgment is present. This whole debate can be conducted in the students' first language, since the goal is not to practice oral production, but instead, to sharpen reading skills. Once students are familiar with this type of analysis, the teacher could increase the challenge by asking students to identify judgment not manifested by adjectives. The next step would be to have students to find evoked judgment. Initially, we suggest that these activities should be done using headlines for their brevity; then, if students feel comfortable with the vocabulary and are receptive to the activity, sections and full articles could be used.

Another possible activity would focus on vocabulary, directing students' attention to the relevance of lexical choices. In pairs or trios, students could be asked to find as many synonyms as possible for specific words, using print or online dictionaries. Then, they would have to rank those synonyms from most negative to most positive, and identify those they consider to be neutral. Groups could be asked to show their findings for the whole class to discuss. This activity could initially be done with words selected by the teacher, and then go on to terms chosen by the students.