Judgment in the News:
The Bolsonaro Government[1]

(Juicio en las noticias: el gobierno Bolsonaro)

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ABSTRACT

An analysis is presented of news articles from *HuffPost* and *Fox News* of instances of judgment towards different Brazilian social actors during the presidency of Jair Messias Bolsonaro (from 2018 to 2021). The news sources were chosen to contemplate different sides of the political spectrum: *HuffPost* representing left-leaning views and *Fox News* representing right-leaning ones. Instances of judgment were classified as positive and negative. The results are interpreted in comparison to each news outlet's alleged political slant, and a pedagogical use of this framework for the EAL classroom is proposed.

RESUMEN

Se analizan noticias de *HuffPost* y *Fox News* para describir instancias de juicio hacia diferentes actores sociales brasileños durante la presidencia de Jair Messias Bolsonaro (de 2018 a 2021). Las fuentes de noticias

se eligieron a fin de contemplar diferentes lados del espectro político: *HuffPost* representando los puntos de vista de izquierda y *Fox News* representando los de derecha. Las instancias de juicio se clasificaron entre positivas y negativas. Se interpretan los resultados en comparación con el supuesto sesgo político de cada medio y se propone un uso pedagógico de este marco para clase de inglés como lengua adicional.

Introduction

Within a recent scenario of the rise of far-right movements in Europe and in the American continent, this study aims to analyze how Brazil, under the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, is portrayed by international media, more specifically on news articles published on the internet. For that purpose, we have used critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) a theoretical framework,[4] combined with Martin and White's framework on evaluation,[5] to investigate how social actors (the president, politicians in general, the people) are named, given prominence, backgrounded and appraised. The corpus consists of eight news stories from two media sources (recognized as representing opposing political points of view) published as of the 2018 presidential election onwards.

CDA is a field of study within the area of applied linguistics, which acknowledges that "language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language."[6] That does not mean to say, however, that social life should be limited

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4   Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003).
5   James Robert Martin and Peter White, *The Language of Evaluation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
6   Fairclough, 2.

to the textual/linguistic sphere, but rather that it is impossible—or at least, unwise—to conduct an analysis of society without considering people's linguistic manifestations.[7] The choice of this research topic, as well as the subsequent choice of its research question, comes from an awareness of such relevance. This topic is also considered relevant due to its temporal proximity: Recent political issues are present every day on the media and on our social network news feeds. Therefore, to study how our countries are portrayed should be an important step towards emancipating ourselves as critical thinking citizens. The findings of this study are meant to inform the teaching of English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Literature Review

To analyze texts so closely related to the power dynamics of contemporary politics, we use a perspective that sees language as "culturally pertinent to a given situation and to a given institutional context – discursive genre perspective – and permeated by values and ideologies – critical perspective."[8] We claim that it would be naive to ignore the social origins of the texts being read, as well as the ideologies that drive their lexical and grammatical choices, especially in a genre that, as mentioned above, deals directly with the decisions of those in power, and the repercussions of those decisions.

Moreover, it is important to have a clear notion of what language teaching is, and therefore, establish goals that go beyond mastering lexico-grammatical accuracy. We agree with Motta-Roth in the sense that "teaching a language is teaching how to act in that language."[9] Language constantly mediates social activities, which become institutionalized

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7   Fairclough, 3.

8   Roseli Gonçalves do Nascimento, "Análise Crítica de Gênero, Planejamento de Material Didático e Letramentos do Professor de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira/Adicional," *Perspectivas Atuais de Aprendizagem e Ensino de Línguas* (Florianópolis: LLE/PPGI/UFSC, 2017) 121.

9   Desirée Motta-Roth, "O ensino de produção textual com base em atividades sociais e gêneros textuais," *Linguagem em (Dis)curso* 6, 3 (2006a): 495-518.

and then constitute genres, that is, recurrent and meaningful ways to act, which structure and put some order in our collective life.[10] From this perspective, we argue that a language teacher's main role is to create conditions for students to recognize texts as both products and processes within a social context and to provide students with tools that enable them to consume and produce the relevant genres critically for their participation as citizens in their communities.

Critically reading the news—the texts that compose this study's corpus—is key to citizenship. News articles are a pivotal example of "cultural constructs that encode values and are an entrance point into a culture."[11] Evidence of this characteristic of news texts is the fact that "different countries and cultures have their own ways of determining what is newsworthy."[12] Thus, the choice for such a genre goes side by side with the theoretical apparatus on which this study is based. As also stated by Caldas-Coulthard,

> We know that 'news' is a socially and culturally determined genre. It is a representation of the world as any other kind of discourse, since all meaning is socially constructed. It is also a product of social practice, as I have already suggested. Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from an ideological position.[13]

Previous studies have investigated Brazilian politics in the news through the lenses of CDA. Meneguelli[14] carries out a detailed reading of articles from the nationally popular *Veja* magazine, to identify how the image of former president Dilma Rousseff is construed through adjectival groups, both before and after the 2014 presidential election.

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10 Motta-Roth (2006a), 495.
11 Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard, *News as Social Practice: A Study in Critical Discourse Analysis* (Florianópolis: Pós Graduação em Inglês, UFSC, 1997) 11.
12 Caldas-Coulthard, 11.
13 Caldas-Coulthard, 34.
14 Gisella Menguelli, "Pluripolítica: tangenciamentos entre o discurso político e o discurso das mídias," *Letras* (Universidade Federal de Santa María) 56 (2018): 209-228. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5902/2176148531152.

In her study, the author explores the connection between text and context, according to Foucault's claim that "discourse is not simply that which translates the fights or the systems of domination, but that for which, by which one fights, the power of which we want to take hold."[15] Discourse is, therefore, such a relevant part of social life of which social actors even struggle to seize control.

Studying a text's lexical choices—more specifically, instances of appraisal—has a considerable potential of revealing an author's ideological position. In the words of Martin and White, it reveals "the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate."[16] It is a way of unveiling whether an author considers a specific event, decision or policy to be pleasant or unpleasant (affect), morally acceptable or reproachable (judgment), worthy or unworthy of praise (appreciation). In this work, we focus on judgment in news articles about politics. We assume that conventions of the factual news genre involve avoidance of overt expressions of affect and appreciation. Judgment, on the other hand, is concerned with the writer's attitude towards people's behavior, and thus is assumed as most frequent in factual news genres.

According to Martin and White, judgment involves evaluations of both social esteem and of social sanction. More specifically, "judgments of esteem have to do with 'normality' (how unusual someone is), 'capacity' (how capable they are) and 'tenacity' (how resolute they are)"[17] while "judgments of sanction have to do with 'veracity' (how truthful someone is) and 'propriety' (how ethical someone is).[18]

Judgment is not only inscribed; in other words, lexical items of explicit attitudinal meaning (positive or negative) are not the only way by which judgment may appear. In given contexts, clauses, phrases and

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15 Meneguelli, 210.
16 Martin and White, 1.
17 Martin and White, 52.
18 Martin and White, 52.

terms which are seemingly neutral (devoid of any attitudinal meaning) may evoke positive or negative judgment. In that case, judgment is considered to be evoked. In this paper, we apply the framework of judgment to news articles to unveil negative and positive evaluation where neutrality is conventionally expected.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study of eight news reports on Bolsonaro's presidency. As critical discourse analysts, our goal is not to generalize but rather to provide a rich and contextualized understanding of selected actors and events from a specific timeframe in the Brazilian political sphere. Our interest is in the specific discursive strategies used by the journalists to build specific representations of such actors and events. The methodology is described in two sections: data collection and data analysis. The first is concerned with the procedures applied for selecting the corpus of this research, its news sources and articles. The second, in turn, is concerned with the procedures used for interpreting such a corpus from a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective.

Data Collection

The choice for news articles comes from an attempt to illustrate how ideological positions are manifested in texts, even in a genre that often claims to be objective. The news sources were chosen by seeking diversity of political viewpoints: Two news companies that are widely recognized[19] as standing on opposing sides (left wing, Democrat or progressive/liberal; right wing, Republican or conservative) were

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19 Jonathan S. Morris. "The Fox News Factor." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10, 3 (2005): 56-79.
Howard, Kurtz. "A Blog That Made It Big." *The Washington Post*, 2007. Accessed on April 7, 2024. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/08/AR2007070801213.html>
"News Sources on the Political Spectrum." University of Michigan Library. 2018. <https://guides.lib.umich.edu/c.php?g=637508&p=4462444>.
Marcel Garz, Gaurav Sood, Daniel Stone and Justin Wallace, "The Supply of Media Slant across Outlets and Demand for Slant within Outlets: Evidence from US Presidential Campaign News," *European Journal of Political Economy* 63 (2020): 877. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2020.101877.

the source of this research corpus: representing the liberal side, *The Huffington Post*; representing the conservative one, *Fox News*. In addition, the online availability of the full articles was another relevant factor for the choice.

Regarding the topics of the news articles, the criterion was the prominence of the issues on Brazilian media during a given time span (2018-2021). Therefore, we collected articles about Bolsonaro's victory in the 2018 election, the fires in the Amazon rainforest, the ministerial changes during the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic in general. As this constitutes four topics, the corpus of this study was composed of eight news articles (one from each of the news sources, in each of the topics). The articles were found through a search using keywords (such as "Bolsonaro," "2018 election," "Mandetta," "Teich," "Bolsonaro Amazon," and "Bolsonaro pandemic") on each news source's website.

Data Analysis

The corpus was read thoroughly to map out the occurrences of judgment towards Brazilian people, territory, and political representatives. In other words, we looked for manifestations of journalists' "attitudes to people and the way they behave."[20] This judgment may be related to "'normality' (how unusual someone is), 'capacity' (how capable they are) and 'tenacity' (how resolute they are)" as well as "'veracity' (how truthful someone is) and 'propriety' (how ethical someone is)."[21] Next we classified such indexes as positive and negative judgment. We also distinguished which social actors received more judgment, and what type of judgment was predominant. These results were then compared to the presumed political viewpoint of each news source.

Table 1 presents the model used for the analysis of each news article. The headings of each column varied depending on which

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20   Martin, White, 52.
21   Martin, White, 52.

social actors were mentioned and given prominence in each of the news articles. For example, in the analysis of the article about former Ministry of Health Luiz Henrique Mandetta's dismissal, there was a column destined to this social actor.

Table 1. Model for analysis of the news articles

	Jair Bolsonaro	**Brazilian government**	**Brazil**
Positive	Instances of positive judgment towards Jair Bolsonaro	Instances of positive judgment towards the Brazilian government	Instances of positive judgment towards Brazil
Negative	Instances of negative judgment towards Jair Bolsonaro	Instances of negative judgment towards the Brazilian government	Instances of negative judgment towards Brazil

Source: The authors, based on their own data.

All eight news articles composing the corpus of this research will be referred to, from now on, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Designation of the news articles

News Source	**Title**	**Designation**
The Huffington Post (HuffPost)	Brazil Elects Far-Right Authoritarian Jair Bolsonaro as President[22]	H1
	Brazil's Bolsonaro Defiant as Global Worry over Amazon Fires Escalates[23]	H2
	Brazilian President Bolsonaro Fires Health Minister Who Refused to Downplay Pandemic[24]	H3
	Bolsonaro Blames the Media As Coronavirus Worsens In Brazil[25]	H4

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22 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/brazil-jair-bolsonaro-wins_n_5bd5f572e4b0a8f17ef8e170.
23 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/amazon-rainforest-fires-global-worry_n_5d5fd3d3e4b02cc97c8c5daf.
24 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/bolsonaro-coronavirus-brazil-mandetta_n_5e97778bc5b6ead140070f6e.
25 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jair-bolsonaro-coronavirus-brazil-trump_n_5e6a443cc5b6747ef1186cb3.

News Source	Title	Designation
Fox News	Brazil Elects Anti-Establishment Candidate Jair Bolsonaro as President [26]	F1
	AP Explains: Brazil's Environmental Changes under Bolsonaro[27]	F2
	Second Brazilian Health Minister Resigns in a Month amid Coronavirus Pandemic[28]	F3
	Bolsonaro Calls Brazilian Cities' Coronavirus Lockdowns a 'Crime'[29]	F4

Source: The authors, based on their own data.

Results and Discussion

To share the results of our analysis of how Brazil under the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro is portrayed in the two media sources, we discuss each news source's attitude[30] in relation to each of the four selected aspects of Bolsonaro's presidency, starting with his election.

The Election of Jair Bolsonaro—2018 (Articles H1 and F1)

In article H1, published on October 28, 2018, and entitled "Brazil Elects Far-Right Authoritarian Jair Bolsonaro As President," we observed only two instances of relatively positive judgment towards Bolsonaro ("the strongest candidate" and "earned support from across Brazil's political and social spectrum"). Most instances of judgment in the remaining of the article heavily criticizes the newly elected president, as revealed by indexes such as "authoritarian," "far-right candidate," "neo-fascist," "violent," "dictator," and "devastating" adopted to judge Bolsonaro and his actions.

Fox News, on the other hand, describes Jair Bolsonaro as an "anti-establishment candidate," as well as "a champion of traditional Brazilian values," implying that the politician's widely reported racist,

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26 https://www.foxnews.com/world/far-right-congressman-wins-brazils-presidency.
27 https://www.foxnews.com/world/ap-explains-brazils-environmental-changes-under-bolsonaro.
28 https://www.foxnews.com/world/brazil-second-health-minister-resigns-coronavirus.
29 https://www.foxnews.com/world/bolsonaro-calls-brazilian-cities-coronavirus-lockdowns-a-crime.
30 Martin and White.

sexist and homophobic stances equate with traditional values. Article F1, entitled "Brazil elects anti-establishment candidate Jair Bolsonaro as president" and published on the same date, also points out that his messages had been recently made "less marginalized," implying that such messages had been just released from unjust censorship. Still, negative judgment is recurrent, although not prominently, but in what seems to be presented as afterward concessions. For instance, F1 highlights contradictions in his career and ideological stance ("a political outsider despite a 27-year career in congress" and "The name of his party [...] translates to 'Social Liberal Party,' although it largely abandoned its socially liberal platforms after he joined"). We identified four indexes of stronger negative judgment: Bolsonaro is referred to as "the brash former army captain"; his positions are depicted as "divisive" and potentially leading to "a bloody crackdown," to an "erosion of civil rights" and of "democracy." At the same time, an instance of attenuation can be perceived, when Fox News mitigates Bolsonaro's extremist agenda by suggesting it is merely sporadic ("offensive statements and *sometimes* [our highlight] extreme views") and, once again, conceding that such agenda would be merely "bolstering his rebel image" and, thus not affecting the office.

Both news sources portray Brazil as a country which is, despite its imposing size and democratic regime, disorganized, rigged with corruption, divided and violent. The epithet "fourth-largest democracy" represents positive evaluation towards both Brazil's size and regime, appearing in both texts. However, negative judgment is largely present when it comes to political organization. As stated by *HuffPost* in H1:

> Since its last presidential election in 2014, one president, Dilma Rousseff, has been impeached; another former president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, has been imprisoned on corruption charges; and its current president, Michel Temer, has been linked to a political bribery scheme.

The excerpt above was interpreted as evoked negative judgment of Brazilian politics. By mentioning, in direct sequence, the cases of the last three presidents being rejected, *HuffPost* evokes the impression that Brazilian politicians, in general, are corrupt, and that Brazil is disorganized and cannot choose and maintain a good leader. Besides that, *HuffPost* uses inscribed negative judgment, calling Brazil a "beleaguered and discontented country," and mentioning that it "experiences high levels of femicide and anti-gay violence" and has one of the "world's deadliest" police forces. The Brazilian population is said to have been "unconvinced or unmoved by Bolsonaro's violent and anti-democratic rhetoric," which can be classified as negative evaluation. *Fox News*, in turn, mentions a "political tempest," "years of turmoil," and "years of corruption, an economy that has struggled to recover after a punishing recession, and a surge in violence."

Environmental Issues—2019 (texts H2 and F2)

When it comes to environmental issues, we observed a similar pattern across the two news sources: *HuffPost* makes heavy and inscribed negative judgment, while *Fox News* alternates between inscribed and evoked judgment, with instances of attenuation. H2 sets an angle of negative judgment for Bolsonaro's behavior from the title: "Brazil's Bolsonaro Defiant as Global Worry over Amazon Fires Escalates." There are no instances of positive judgment, and the Brazilian president is portrayed as aggressive ("traded twitter jabs with" and "fired back"), negligent towards the environment, since he "described Brazil's rainforest protections as an obstacle to economic development," and unreliable ("he did not provide any evidence"). The Amazon rainforest, on the other hand, receives at least three instances of positive judgment, being mainly described as essential for humanity ("what some call 'the lungs of the planet'," "a major absorber of carbon dioxide" and "whose degradation could have severe consequences for global climate and rainfall").

F2 resorts to the Associated Press (henceforth AP) for an analysis of Bolsonaro's environmental policies. Its title, "AP Explains: Brazil's Environmental Changes under Bolsonaro," adopts an objective tone. The body of the text, however, follows the trend of construing the Amazon rainforest as essential ("globally vital" and "the preservation of which is seen by scientists as crucial in the campaign to slow climate change"). Brazil is depicted as a place where environmental regulations are not respected ("groups monitoring illicit harvesting have reported a double-digit increase in deforestation in the Amazon region"), and judgment towards the Brazilian government is predominantly negative. Bolsonaro and his ministers are said to be negligent and skeptic towards climate change, and irresponsible towards regulations that protect the Amazon and indigenous peoples. The article calls attention to the moments when the government put the "agribusiness caucus" in charge of controlling deforestation, as well as the Ministry for Family, Women and Human Rights—"headed by an ultraconservative evangelical pastor"—in charge of indigenous affairs.

Although the *Fox News* judgment is frequently negative towards the Brazilian president, it continues to present attenuation. Right from the headline, Bolsonaro's decisions regarding the environment are referred to as mere "changes," which do not reflect the negligence towards (and dismantling of) environmental regulations described later. Besides, when the loosening of regulations by the Bolsonaro's administration is mentioned, it is associated with economic benefits: "opening the globally vital Amazon rainforest to development and agribusiness," "help business expand operations in Brazil" and "the new administration is determined to bring investors to Brazil despite environmental costs."

Ministerial Changes—2020 (texts H3 and F3)

Ministerial changes were another remarkable characteristic of the Bolsonaro presidency approached by *HuffPost* and *Fox News*. H3, entitled "Brazilian President Bolsonaro Fires Health Minister

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").

In *Fox News*, we did not identify articles which directly addressed Mandetta's dismissal, but the resignation of Mandetta's successor, Nelson Teich, which happened less than a month after he took office. F3, entitled "Second Brazilian health minister resigns in a month amid coronavirus pandemic" (May 15, 2020), contains only one instance of evoked positive judgment, which is directed to Nelson Teich: "Teich opposed distributing the anti-malaria drug chloroquine to coronavirus-positive patients, calling it 'an uncertainty.'" Apart from that, F3 contains mostly negative judgment towards Bolsonaro, Teich, the Brazilian government and Brazil itself.

They say Teich "did not give any specific reason as to why he abruptly resigned" [...] after just weeks on the job." Bolsonaro, in turn, is depicted as negligent towards social distancing since he "permitted gyms, hair salons and barbers to reopen Monday, regardless of the spike in cases" and "opposed many of the social-distancing lockdown measures and pushed to restart the economy, despite continual increases in coronavirus cases." It is important to notice, however, an attempt to mitigate the president's dismissal of health measures, which is portrayed as concern with the country's economic interests ("pushed to restart the economy").

The Brazilian government is said to have promoted "insufficient testing" and prioritized chloroquine distribution, which besides being called an "anti-malaria drug," is said to have been proved ineffective: "[r]esearch last month in the United States reported no benefits to using the drug to treat people in hospitals."

The COVID-19 Pandemic—2020 (texts H4 and F4)

Regarding the pandemic period in general, *HuffPost* maintains its tone of a heavily negative judgment towards Bolsonaro and the Brazilian government. Such a negative angle is set by H4's title, "Bolsonaro Blames the Media as Coronavirus Worsens in Brazil" (March 12, 2020). The only instance of positive judgment that we identified

is inscribed and directed towards Luiz Henrique Mandetta. Citing Brazilian media outlet UOL, the article mentions that Mandetta:

> urged states to review and, if necessary, implement contingency plans to deal with the spread of the virus. He's also seeking more funding in order to purchase more medical supplies to help control the outbreak and urged Brazilians to "be careful." (H4)

Although the excerpt does not contain attitudinal markers that construe positive or negative judgment, it reports actions by Mandetta which build his general behavior of propriety in response to the pandemic, which contrast with those held by the former president.

Bolsonaro is once again construed as the "far-right" president responding inadequately to the seriousness of the situation. "Bolsonaro told reporters that coronavirus concerns [...] were a "fantasy" concocted by the media"; "that fears over COVID-19 [...] were inflated because 'other forms of flu killed more than this' illness has"; "the Brazilian president shrugs"; and "having remained largely silent as the coronavirus initially spread" are explicit indexes of negative judgment towards the ruler. The administration is also judged improperly slow in their responses to public duties when the article mentions that "Brazil has not *yet* [our highlight] recommended the cancellation of large public events or gatherings." Besides, the article narrates a specific case of contradiction from a government official:

> Fabio Wajngarten, Bolsonaro's top communications official, [...] was photographed with Trump at the resort. "I am fine," Wajngarten tweeted [...]. His tweet blamed [...] the press whom he accused of constantly trying to bring him down. Wajngarten tested positive for the virus on Thursday morning. (H4)

Again, we classify the excerpt above as an instance of invoked negative judgment. Although it does not contain any intrinsically negative marker, it lists actions by a government official that characterize

disrespect of public health recommendations. H4 frequently highlights Bolsonaro's close relationship with former U.S. president Donald Trump, who also receives inscribed negative judgment—the article points out that he had a "conspiratorial response to the coronavirus pandemic" and a "lackluster response to the crisis." In the subtitle, Bolsonaro is referred to as "a close Trump ally"; the opening image of the article shows the two politicians shaking hands; Trump is referred to as [Bolsonaro's] American counterpart; Bolsonaro is said to have "adopted another of Trump's early talking points'"; and finally, the article says that

> Bolsonaro and Trump struck up *a convenient friendship* [our highlight] after the Brazilian, *modeling his pitch in part on the American's* [our highlight], won the election in 2018. *Like Trump* [our highlight], Bolsonaro routinely accuses the media of peddling "fake news" meant to cripple his presidency. (H4, my emphasis)

F4 (March 25, 2020), entitled "Bolsonaro calls Brazilian cities' coronavirus lockdowns a 'crime'," presents fewer instances of judgment, although such judgment remains negative. In this article, Bolsonaro is described as a denier, who is not in syntony with his own government: "'Other viruses have killed many more than this one and there wasn't all this commotion,' Bolsonaro, departing from the advice of his own Health Ministry, told reporters." The Brazilian president is shown threatening democracy: "'If we don't get back to work, Brazil could depart from democratic normalcy,' citing examples of social unrest across Latin America." However, following the trend of previous *Fox News* articles analyzed here, negative judgment is occasionally attenuated:

> the conservative president also played down the threat of the virus, in a contentious national address he told Brazilians: "90 percent of us will have no symptoms if contaminated." He added that his

"history as an athlete" meant he would suffer from no more than "a little flu" if infected. (F4)

Instead of the frequent—and accurate—"far-right," the journalist chooses the softer term "conservative." Instead of "reckless" or "misleading," the text choses the softer "contentious." The lack of financial support from the government for weakened sectors of the economy is explained by alleged incapacity: "The Economy Ministry has said it would not take on long-term debt in order to rescue the economy. A top official said that there was no capacity for huge fiscal packages to fight coronavirus." This can be regarded as another instance of attenuated negative judgment: Even though the article highlights the fact that there was no response to the crisis, it suggests that the government's hands were tied and it was not a political decision.

Regarding government officials, we identified instances of inscribed and invoked negative judgment. F4 cites an interview conducted by *The Guardian*, in which a favela resident said that "(drug) traffickers are doing this [imposing curfews] because the government is absent. The authorities are blind to us." In the excerpt, negative judgment of propriety is inscribed by choices such as "absent" and "blind to." One instance of invoked negative judgment can be observed in:

> Brazil's national security adviser, Augusto Heleno, on Wednesday cut his medically advised quarantine short, returning to work just seven days into a 14-day quarantine after a positive coronavirus test. Heleno also attended cabinet meetings on the day of his test, Reuters reported. (F4)

In the excerpt, an apparently neutral report of the actions by the national security adviser builds up an objectionable profile: an official who acts against public health security, and thus, inappropriately.

Discussion

In general, all eight articles from the two news sources analyzed make predominantly negative judgments of social sanction (propriety), and less often, social esteem (capacity), about Bolsonaro and his administration. Instances of positive judgment are the rare exception. This supports the hypothesis that Bolsonaro's extremism, authoritarianism and disregard for democracy and human rights are considered too extreme to be defended, even by traditionally right-wing media sources such as *Fox News*. However, the conservative channel still finds room for attenuation when it comes to economic matters. Policies which are hostile to public health or the environment are often described as having positive purposes (e.g., development). As for judging Brazil as a whole, both news sources agree that it is a big and beautiful country, full of important natural resources, but stained by corruption, disorganization and violence.

Taking into account the political slant of *HuffPost*, the results obtained by this research are no surprise. *HuffPost* is a liberal site,[31] also considered to be left-leaning[32] or left-of-center,[33] so on this website judgment of Bolsonaro and his administration is more intense, being predominantly inscribed rather than evoked. Terms such as "far-right," "violent," "neo-fascist," "authoritarian," "conspiratorial," "incapable" and "incompetent" appear in the texts. In the article from this media source, we have not identified attenuation strategies, with the texts not holding back when it comes to detailing harmful consequences of Bolsonaro's (and his administration's) statements, attitudes and policies.

Fox News, on the other hand, is known to offer "a conservative ideological voice"[34] and to be "filled with conservatives."[35]

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31 The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "HuffPost." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed on August 17th, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Huffington-Post>.

32 Kurtz.

33 Garz, Sood, Stone, and Wallace.

34 Jeffrey P. Jones, "Fox News and the Performance of Ideology," *Cinema Journal* 51, 4 (2012): 178-185. DOI: 10.1353/cj.2012.0073.

35 Tim Groseclose and Jeffrey Milyo, "A Measure of Media Bias," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, 4 (2005): 1194. DOI: 10.1162/003355305775097542.

Groseclose and Milyo add that *Fox News* is one of the few news outlets in the United States not to have "a strong liberal bias."[36] Even so, negative judgment towards Bolsonaro and his administration is predominant. One difference is that such judgment is often evoked, that is, implicit, and occasionally mitigated by the use of relatively neutral describers or by later concessions as we hope to have demonstrated in the previous section. The findings of this research do not mean that *Fox News* gave up its conservatism while reporting issues involving Bolsonaro. Instead, they criticized what was unacceptable from a sensible point of view, but the reduced intensity of that criticism and the perceived attenuation resonate with the political slant that *Fox News* is said to have.

This research has shown that, even though "contexts precede texts,"[37] an analysis focused solely on context is not enough to predict every nuance of meaning negotiated in a text. And the meanings construed in texts may contribute to reinforce or to challenge contexts.

We conducted this analysis hoping to stimulate educators to explore news genres in their classrooms, being always mindful that, even though the context may predict much information, critical analysis of how social actors are represented in texts is crucial for both reading texts and understanding the world around us. That is even more important when those social actors are ourselves, our country and our political representatives, since it increases the potential for interculturality in the teaching of additional languages, creating a dialogue between cultures[38] in which the students' culture is pivotal. In other words, when we read texts produced by others (US media) about us (Brazilians or Latin Americans in general), it is an opportunity for us to comprehend our own culture better, elaborate and resignify it.

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36 Groseclose and Milyo, 1192.

37 Michael A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective* (Victoria: Deakin University Press, 1985) 5.

38 Desirée Motta-Roth, Competências Comunicativas Interculturais no Ensino de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira. *Linguagem, cultura e sociedade* (Santa Maria: PPGL Editores/UFSM, 2006b).

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.

Regarding linguistic production activities, students could be asked to take instances of judgment from journalistic texts—including those identified in previous reading activities—and transform them, making them positive, neutral or negative. Such an exercise would be effective in showing students the impact of lexico-grammatical choices, and the fact that similar propositional content can be conveyed using different levels of appraisal. The reverse path can also be taken: Students could be asked to transform neutral excerpts into positive or negative instances of judgment. As a way of stimulating creativity and promoting a ludic approach, students could be asked to invent headlines or paragraphs carrying instances of judgments. Groups could be asked to identify the instances of judgment in the language their classmates used. These and many other similar activities may be used in EAL courses to enhance students' critical thinking.