Language Practices of Cyberhate in Unfolding Global and Local Realities

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To D. Emília, Pedro, Izabel and Adriano

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INTRODUCTION

INÊS SIGNORINI, EDITOR

The advent of wide-reaching communication technologies and networked media forged social networking systems which enabled translocal communication networks through affordable and transportable digital technologies all around the world. Indeed, since the rise of 'social media' in the late 2010s, communities based on affects and affinities have rapidly spread and reached an audience never imagined before. As argued by media and technology theorists (Castells 1996 2000, Walsham 2001), this technologically and economically homogenizing force has been producing mobilities and relations, but especially epistemic, ideological and political shifts on a vast scale, notwithstanding their heterogeneous instantiation across regions, countries and communities. In the same vein, anthropologists, social scientists and applied linguists have argued that both physical flows (capital, people and commodities) and intangible flows (data, information, concepts and ideologies) are physically and mentally transformative and disruptive forces fueling contemporary networked communities (Appadurai 1996, Heyman and Campbel 2009, Pennycook 2007, Blommaert 2010, among others).

A well-known phenomenon associated to these networked communities is the production and circulation of a range of new forms of misinformation cascades (Easley and Kleinberg 2010), often disseminated deliberately to deceive, in addition to new forms of verbal and semiotic intimidation, or cyberhate. Indeed, the networked communication through the Web became a privileged tool to disseminate hatred, based on all sorts of bias and prejudice. The usage of a hashtag points to this cascade behavior as it promotes a sense of belonging, of being a part of a translocal, even global community.

However, the impact of global homogenizing forces affecting and producing local realities depends on a myriad of intertwined constituencies and socio-political intricacies which characterize local contexts. Accordingly, both colonial and postcolonial past and present, along with contemporary intellectual and political movements like feminism, multiculturalism and religious fundamentalisms, for example, might interpenetrate and thereby inform an acute tension and sometimes a mismatch or a striking contradiction

between globalizing processes of homogenization and localizing processes of differentiation and/or resistance.

The notions of glocality and glocalization attempt to capture the phenomena resulting from the co-existence of emplaced and embodied local and global forces in people's lives: "We now live in ´glocalities´. Each glocality is unique in many ways, and yet each is also influenced by global trends and global consciousness" (Meyrowitz 2005, 23). Thereby, some main aspects of the dynamic constitution of glocally embodied experiences, enhanced by social networking electronic systems, are deeply implicated in the interplay of these issues.

Meyrowitz (2005) adds that recursively entwining actual and virtual, individual and social, enables the multiplicity and the instability of identities-"the possibility of having multiple, multi-layered, fluid, and endlessly adjustable senses of identity"; as well as the instability of situational boundaries-"the definitions of the situation are multiple and unstable, able to shift" (2005, 28). Similarly, the "dissociation between physical place and experiential space" in overlapping experiences produces "a blurring of traditional distinctions" between private and public spheres, between age and gender spheres of experience and, consequently, between local and glocal morality (2005, 27; 29).

Nonetheless, as individuals interpret and rework global cultural practices and meanings to fit into their emplaced and embodied specific situations, their appropriations are simultaneously in fusion and in tension with these practices and meanings. In summary, these networked unfolding glocal realities are always constructed in relation to local historical, sociocultural and political conditions: the intertwined constituencies and intricacies mentioned above.

In this volume, we treat hateful speech enhanced by the wide-reaching communication technologies and networked media as a glocal phenomenon by tracing the production and circulation of language practices of cyberhate in relation to global movements of hate (Perry and Olsson 2009), pandemic negationism (Morel 2021), conspiracy theories (Spring; Wendling, 2020; Sganzerla, 2020) religious fundamentalism (Ariel 2016, Spadaro and Figueroa 2017) and far-right political ideologies; but also in relation to transnational feminism and minority civil rights movements (Sardenberg 2004) and how they had glocalized.

The focus on contemporary Brazilian contexts contributes to the analytical approach to these issues due to the routine exposure to a massive digital infodemia and hateful speech related to three overlapping factors: a political-ideological and social confrontation, fueled by the far-right regime in power since 2018; a state of emergency of public health triggered by the

COVID-19 pandemic; and a necropolitics of pandemic negationism from federal authorities (Dall'Alba et al. 2021).

Indeed, this routine exposure painfully affects the lives of individuals and communities across the country, exposing the underlying vulnerabilities and inequalities of the so-called post-colonial and post-slavery global south, particularly in Latin America. The differential role assumed by communication through digital social networks in local political struggles, including the politicization of the pandemic, reveals the tensions and passions at stake, while triggering and inspiring othering processes through the production and massive circulation of disinformation and discourse of hate. Thus, though neither entirely new nor everywhere identical in terms of its meaning, material embodiment, and effects, language practices of cyberhate shed light on how local people imagine social relatedness and other forms of "self-other" interplay across society.

In addition, these othering processes highlight how global trends are glocalized in a worldview that calls for individual and collective salvation (against evil, communism, feminism etc.) based on Judeo-Christian conservative ideals and values on the one hand, and appealing to conflictual positions on relevant sociopolitical issues like cultural pluralism and especially race and gender pluralism, on the other. From this point of view, beyond Brazil, the focus on Brazilian contexts sheds light on the relationship between universalizing and particularizing trends in an increasingly complex and pluralist society.

The two sections into which this book is divided are intended to explore from different perspectives two main layers of contextualization and analysis concerning cyberhate practices within the focused glocal realities. They include selected and edited papers from the "Language Practices of Cyberhate" panel, presented at the 17th International Pragmatics Conference (IPrA 2021).

In Section I, authors deal with the interconnectedness, in these practices, of the use of digital resources, rhetorical strategies and interpretation frameworks embedded in the dynamics of socio-historical and political-ideological forces affecting offline contexts. Section II is dedicated to examining the specific dynamics of different forms of digital activism in resisting hateful online and offline attacks, such as the sexist and misogynistic violence that permeates the political-ideological struggles in contemporary Brazil.

In the first chapter of Section I, Heronides Moura shows how persuasion is a powerful strategy for dissemination of hate speech and fake news by a far-right media outlet dedicated to promoting struggles against left-wing local political-ideological agendas, while resonating similar struggles on a

global level. In chapter 2, Inês Signorini considers the fundamental role of a structured cluster of conceptual metaphors articulated through mini-narratives or scenarios in support of political-ideological struggles embedded in hateful discussions displayed on Bolsonaro´s official Facebook page concerning COVID-19 control policies. The focused discussions also resonate the conservative political issues spread globally. The following chapter, by Aryane Santos Nogueira, concludes this section by presenting different levels of contextualization of a set of comments to a message posted by a deaf woman from the federal government on her official Facebook page. Within this deaf network, hateful speech also reproduces electoral cleavages displayed online and offline at the time, along with specific ableist and sociolinguistic-based hate.

Section II begins with Anna Christina Bentes and Edwiges Morato's chapter: an analysis of online reflexive and critical discursive actions aimed at combating Bolsonaro´s hateful public speech against measures of prevention and control of Covid-19 pandemic. In chapter 5, Fabiana Biondo and Clara Dornelles examine how followers of a feminist activist Instagram page get involved in discursive struggles over feminism, religion and gender policies that turn into hateful and harassment discourse, also affected by electoral political-ideological polarization. In chapter 6, Ana Amélia Calazans da Rosa and Júlia Lourenço Costa conclude this section by presenting an analysis of identity construction and expressions of authenticity on social media by a young feminist woman in her fight against cyber attacks on her political persona since she was the running mate of the left-wing alliance's presidential candidate in 2018.

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SECTION I

CHAPTER ONE

PERSUASION MANEUVERING BY A FAR-RIGHT
BRAZILIAN MEDIA OUTLET

HERONIDES MOURA

Abstract

I examine the discourse about coronavirus in the Brazilian far-right news site *Critica Nacional* (*criticanacional.com.br)*. I contend that this outlet employs a particular rhetorical strategy that may be considered as persuasion and not as manipulation. The strategy is that of *flipping the frames* (Pinker 2007). To flip the frames is to change from one to another construal of the same event, by using particular linguistic constructions. The argumentative maneuvering used by Crítica Nacional is not to deny the pandemics, but to call the reader attention to another way of looking at the pathogen. The virus is framed as a social phenomenon, which brings about a set of economic and political challenges. In a constructional approach (Goldberg 1995), I describe the linguistic constructions used to frame the coronavirus. The analysis of the data has shown that the outlet consistently avoids using constructions that instantiate the biological frame. Particularly, the outlet circumvents information about the circulation of the virus. My main conclusion is that it is not necessarily the case that hate speech is grounded on manipulation. As I show, far-right discourse may use persuasion techniques to foster extremist beliefs. Although some instances of cyberhate speech are apparently indistinguishable, on linguistic grounds, from 'normal' persuasion, they need to be examined from an ethical point of view. Even if an argumentation is not truth-functionally defective, its conclusions may be considered devious from a moral point of view (Graham 2018).

Keywords: hate speech; manipulation; persuasion; grammatical constructions

Persuasion as a rhetorical strategy in hate speech

In this chapter, I will examine the discourse about coronavirus in the Brazilian far-right news site *Critica Nacional* (*criticanacional.com.br)*. This media outlet spreads hate speech and fake news, attacking leftist political organizations, international institutions (like *WHO- World Health Organization*) and women´s and black rights movements (like *Black Lives Matter*). Its main goal is to fight against multiculturalism, globalism and communism, promoting so called anti-establishment ideologies.

The outlet *Critica Nacional* (henceforth CN) may be included in these internet subcultures of new far–right movements which organize on line around the world in an effort to promote authoritarian and populist messages (Marwick and Lewis 2017).

Broadly speaking, there can be no doubt that CN is part of the post-truth world, "a growing international trend to bend reality to fit their opinions, rather than the other way around" (Mcintyre, 2018, 5). As a whole, this Brazilian media outlet manipulates information in order to promote pro-Bolsonaro and even pro-Trump messages.

But in the particular case of coronavirus, the outlet uses a different type of rhetorical strategy. The discourse about coronavirus is not negationist, because it assumes that the virus is real and it is framed as a rational presentation of the facts. A CN´editorial states flatly that the coronavirus pandemic is a real problem[1]:

> (1) Coronavirus is a real public health problem that needs to be dealt with the utmost seriousness and responsibility by government officials. (CN 3-11-2020)[2]

CN's discourse doesn´t assume that the coronavirus pandemic is a hoax. Instead of considering it a mere conspiracy of communists and globalists, the outlet tries to persuade the reader that the pandemic is not dramatic and that adequate measures can be found to cope with it.

I used the verb *persuade* intentionally. I contend that this outlet employs a particular rhetorical strategy that may be considered as persuasion and not as manipulation. The strategy is that of *flipping the frames* (Pinker, 2007). To flip the frames is to change from one to another construal of the same event, by using specific linguistic constructions.

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[1] The translations are mine.
[2] In Portuguese: O coronavírus é um problema real de saúde pública que precisa ser tratado com a máxima seriedade e responsabilidade pelas autoridades governamentais

The argumentative maneuvering is not to deny the pandemics, but to call the reader attention to another way of looking at the pathogen. The virus is framed as a social phenomenon, which brings about a set of economic and political challenges.

The analysis of the data, in the following section, shows that the outlet consistently avoids using constructions that instantiate the biological frame. Particularly, the outlet circumvents information about the circulation of the virus. It focuses on the political and economic outcomes of pandemic, flipping the discourse from biology to politics.

In the section *Flipping the frames as a persuasive strategy*, I argue that the definitions of manipulation found in the literature doesn´t apply to this kind of rhetorical strategy. This argumentative maneuvering is just a garden-variety persuasive move and not a manipulative one. My contention is that cyberhate speech should not be considered necessarily manipulative in every rhetorical maneuvering. In certain contexts, rational persuasive discourse seems to be the best rhetorical strategy to achieve the goals of hate speech.

In the final section, I make some concluding remarks about how persuasion may operate in hate speech.

Flipping the frames: analysis of the data

The far-right media outlet CN makes use of mainly one strategy in order to persuade the reader that the *coronavirus* pandemic is mostly a political issue. It flips the frames (Pinker, 2007), highlighting the social outcomes of the coronavirus and neglecting information about its biological nature and about how it spreads. As the coronavirus is featured as a social and political phenomenon, the most relevant information to be provided is about such characteristics. Biology is engulfed by politics. CN doesn´t deny the biological and epidemiologic aspects of the virus (how it is transmitted, how it spreads and so on).

Information about the social aspects of the virus is foregrounded and information about the whereabouts of the pathogen is left on the background or simply disappears from the sentences about the virus.

Different linguistic constructions provide different construals of the same event (Pinker, 2007). As Langacker (2002, 5) points out, speakers have a "manifest capacity to structure or construe the content of a domain in alternate ways".

Pinker´s hypothesis is that changing from one to another linguistic construction is equal to a gestalt-shift. Each gestalt provides the mind with "the power to frame a single situation in very different ways" (Pinker, 2007,

45). Analogous to gestalt principles, a frame determines how humans perceive a state of affairs, taking into account the connection between the elements of the scene. Different perceived connections between the elements give rise to different meanings.

Defined in this way, a frame implies that any element is perceived in a larger context. To flip a frame is to flip the context through which each element is perceived. Pinker´s definition is similar to that proposed in Frame Semantics, according to which a frame can be defined as a coherent structure of related concepts. As Fillmore (1982) puts it, a frame is "any system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any one of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits" (Fillmore 1982, 111).

The idea is that the explanation of linguistic competence should be shifted from lexical entry to constructions (Borer, 2015). In this sense, Pinker´s theory is more constructional (the units that instantiate frames are constructions) and Fillmore´s theory is more lexical (the units that instantiate frames are lexical items), but the constructional and lexical approaches may overlap (see Goldberg, 1995).

According to the constructional approach, constructions are seen as the mechanisms by which the states of affairs are conceptualized. Thus, the better way to describe different conceptualizations is to provide a careful examination of the constructions used by speakers.

If we want to examine how a piece of information is codified, we need to look into the constructions in which such piece of information is embedded. Thus, I scanned through the different constructions used by CN whenever the word *virus* occurred. The more important is not the word itself, but the different grammatical constructions in which the virus was framed.

I´ve found 203 different sentences containing at least a token of the word *virus*. These sentences appeared in posts about the coronavirus in Brazil. I´ve excluded from the corpus the posts regarding exclusively the coronavirus pandemics in other countries. I´ve also excluded from the corpus the uses of the word *virus*, whenever it didn´t denote the coronavirus. The data covered the period from January 2020 to March 2021 and the sentences were manually extracted. I consider my units of analysis as sentences, because I`m interested in grammatical constructions, seen as instantiations of frames. Notwithstanding, every particular sentence in context becomes an utterance.

Looking through my data of 203 sentences, I´ve identified two sets of constructions. The first set allows a grammatical slot for the expression of the location of the virus. The second set doesn´t include any grammatical slot for the expression of the whereabouts of the virus.

At close inspection of the data, I´ve identified two constructions which conveyed information about the whereabouts of the virus. These two constructions are used to construe the biological frame. I aimed at a more detailed description of these constructions, which are part of my first set of constructions, in order to have a consistent tool to proceed to the final step, in which I counted the tokens of constructions pertaining to the first set.

As we have seen, the first set of constructions allows a grammatical slot for the expression of the location of the virus. The two constructions pertaining to this set are the following: The first one is the locative adverbial phrase, marked in bold in examples (2) e (3), below:

(2) The State of São Paulo concentrates about half of the cases of contagion and deaths resulting from the Chinese virus **throughout Brazil** (CN 4-03-2020)[3].

(3) 11.123 deaths due to virus infection **in Brazil**.[4] (CN 11-05-2020)

The second construction employs a verb (like *hit, attack, infect, transmit, contaminate*) which presents an argument whose thematic role is a locative. That is to say, the first argument (the subject) is the pathogen and the second argument (the object) is the location to where the pathogen moves. An example is given below (the locative argument is marked in bold):

(4) The state of Pará has so far registered about **7.256 cases of people** infected with the Chinese virus and 652 deaths (CN 05-11-2020).[5]

Verbs like *infect, transmit* and *contaminate* are good instantiations of the biological frame. Whenever a speaker choses a construction with any of these verbs, he is bounded to provide information about where the virus is circulating.

As CN´s discourse tries to divert the reader´s attention from the biological frame, verbs like *infect* should be largely absent from the discourse. As expected, there are just a few tokens (a total of three) of these verbs in the corpus.

While other verbs instantiating the biological frame do occur, they are rare. An example is the verb *bind* (marked in bold), in (5):

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[3] In Portuguese: O Estado de São Paulo concentra cerca da metade dos casos de contágio e de óbitos decorrentes do vírus chinês **em todo o Brasil**

[4] In Portuguese: 11.123 óbitos em razão da infecção pelo vírus **no Brasil**

[5] In Portuguese: O estado do Pará registrou até o momento cerca de **7.256 casos de pessoas** infectadas pelo vírus chinês e 652 óbitos

(5) The virus **binds** to a protein present in the cell membrane (CN 3-05-2020).[6]

It´s worth noticing that the scientific discourse is not entirely neglected in CN discourse, but it is immersed in a huge amount of political discussions.

My final step was to count how many tokens of the two constructions cited above are found in the corpus. From the total of 203 sentences, only 27 (13,30%) convey information about the spreading of the virus and 176 (86,69%) convey no information about where the virus is. The results are shown in Graph 1-1 below:

Graph 1-1. Spatial information about the coronavirus
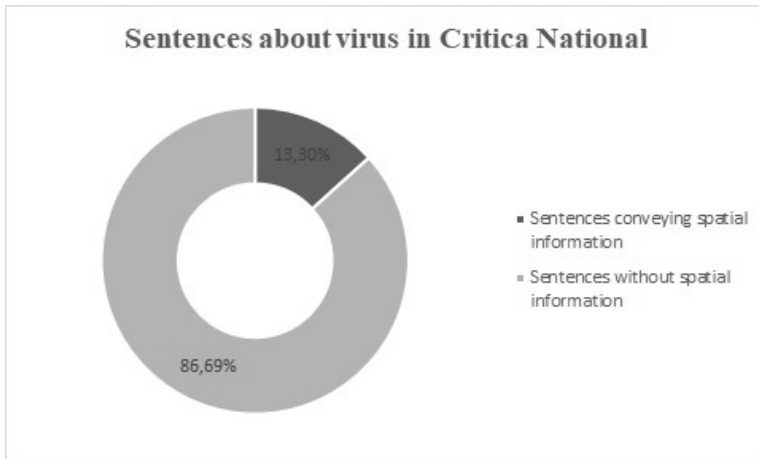
Source: the author

From the analysis of the data, we can conclude that the media outlet CN deliberately avoid the use of constructions which would force the speaker into conveying information about the circulation of the virus.

The preferred linguistic constructions are the ones which construe the virus as a social phenomenon. This construal can be seen in examples like (6) and (7):

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[6] In Portuguese: o vírus liga-se a uma proteína presente na membrana celular.

(6) The Federal Government needs to review the communication strategy of the press conferences held daily by ministers on the topic of the Chinese virus epidemic. (CN 4-02-2020)[7]

(7) (measures) to mitigate the effects of the crisis caused by the Chinese virus pandemic... (CN 04-03-2020)[8]

In the examples above, the virus is framed respectively as a social issue to be tackled by the government and as an economic trouble. In these utterances, there is no linguistic slot to be filled with information about the circulation of the virus. An entirely different frame should be evoked if a verb like *infect* had been used. But, again, biology is engulfed by politics (and economics).

It is noteworthy that the fight against the virus is construed not as fight against the spreading of the pathogen, but as measures intending to mitigate the effects of the disease on the economy.

The rhetorical strategy of circumventing information about the biological aspects of the pandemics is paradoxically reinforced when the outlet twist the reader´s attention to the coronavirus vaccines. By highlighting the challenges surrounding the vaccination, the outlet is allowed not to provide information about the spreading of the virus:

(8) The lawsuits that discuss the mandatory vaccination against the Chinese virus were filed by (Brazilian political parties) PDT and PTB. (CN 12-02-2020)[9]

Flipping the frames as a persuasive strategy

The outlet CN tries to persuade the reader that the coronavirus pandemic is not dramatic. It makes uses of persuasion in order to minimize the risks and the health issues of the pandemics. As we have seen in the last section, it does so by using a very effective strategy: it flips the frames about the coronavirus.

CN emphasizes the political implications of the virus (how it damages the Brazilian economy, how it is used as a political tool by the globalists

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[7] In Portuguese: O Governo Federal precisa rever a estratégia de comunicação por meio das entrevistas coletivas concedidas diariamente pelos ministros a respeito da epidemia do vírus chinês.

[8] In Portuguese: (medidas) para mitigar os efeitos da crise provocada pela pandemia do vírus chinês

[9] In Portuguese: As ações que discutem a obrigatoriedade da vacinação contra o vírus chinês foram ajuizadas pelo PDT e pelo PTB.

and so on) and holds back information about where the virus is and about how it is spreading.

This strategy exploits the Gricean Maxims of Relevance and Quantity, by selecting as relevant only the information about the political outcomes of the pandemic and neglecting information about the spreading of the virus. I argue that this strategy is not manipulative, but persuasive. This rhetorical move doesn´t intend to deceive, by inducing the reader to believe in false assumptions.

By flipping the frames, the outlet aims at influencing the readers in two ways: First, to call the reader´s attention to the undesired political consequences of the pandemic, from a far-right point of view.

Among those undesired outcomes, CN underscores the strengthening of global power and the weakening of national economies. The message is that the coronavirus pandemics is used as a form of social control (a similar claim has been made by postmodernist philosophers, from a leftist point of view; see Moura 2021). Lockdown, social distance and use of masks are seen as reinforcing the power of governments around the world:

> (9) The imposition of wearing a mask is much more related to forms of social control than to effective prophylaxis against the Chinese virus. (CN 11-20-2020)[10]

Second, the strategy implies that the pandemic is not dramatic, trying to convince the reader not to focus on the commotion around him.

I argue that the strategy of flipping the frames is a garden-variety persuasion move. It tries to influence people´s beliefs, by strengthening some arguments and weakening others. Manipulation, on the other hand, is defined as deception and the imposing of the speaker's beliefs on the hearer, by "sneaking in 'extra' propositions" (Rocci 2015, 94) and "smuggling" information (Maillat 2013, 195).

While persuasion aims at changing the beliefs of free people, manipulation is defined as abuse of power (Van Dijk 2006). In manipulative discourses, "the message is imposed upon the hearers" (Cabrejas-Peñuelas 2017, 210) and the speaker interferes with the hearer´s free agency (Wood 2014, 31). Manipulative discourse misleads and fosters false assumptions (Wood 2014, 35).

Flipping the frames is not manipulation. This strategy doesn´t coerce the reader into believing false assumptions. The coronavirus pandemic *is* a

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[10] In Portuguese: a imposição do uso de máscara está muito mais relacionado a formas de controle social do que uma efetiva profilaxia em relação ao vírus chinês.

social phenomenon and its political consequences may be freely discussed. The outlet is not denying that the virus is a biological reality. It simply tries to make the reader believe that the social phenomenon is more relevant than the biological one.

Is this manipulation? And how this kind of argumentation operates in a hate speech? My point is that this particular rhetorical strategy is not manipulative, because it is not trying to deceive the reader. The overall discourse of CN is manipulative and full of lies, as we have seen. But this particular instantiation of discourse is not. How to grapple with this contradiction? I think that the moral stance is the only way to solve the contradiction: the overall discourse of CN is immoral, for spreading lies in manipulative discourses and for trying to persuade the reader of political ideas about the coronavirus that are damaging to the best interests of the Brazilian population. From a moral point of view, rational persuasion can be as bad as post-truth manipulation.

I´ve shown that there is no manipulation in featuring the virus as a social phenomenon, but this doesn´t imply that if a discourse is true, it is necessarily moral. As Graham (2018, 2) puts it, "truth is only one kind of judgement we can make about an utterance". The evaluation goes beyond the "mere" truth:

> "… when we discuss the way people address each other; how they deploy linguistic and other meaning making resources to achieve personal, social, and political ends; and about what motivates such actions in respect of their descriptive, evaluative, and persuasive ends, we are into a far more complex terrain than that of 'mere' truth and facts" (Graham 2018, 2).

CN deploys linguistic constructions in order to achieve political aims and persuasive ends which are immoral. A discourse may be reasonable and at the same time completely immoral. For instance, someone may argue that to keep elderly people for a long time in an ICU is a waste of scarce social resources and that the same resources might be channeled into more useful aims, such as children´s education.

If we want to make the critique of political discourses, we must go beyond judgments of truth values (even if truth is a basic moral value). From a critical perspective, the researcher has to foreground the ethical implications of a political discourse and how it can hurt "vulnerable people directly" and reinforce "attitudes that cause further harm" (Graham 2018, 3).

Noggle (2020) points out that vulnerable people are more prone to be the victims of manipulation. It is interesting to notice that rational persuasion may be as damaging as manipulation to vulnerable people. My

point is that, irrespective of its truth-values, the strategy of downgrading the biological frame does hurt vulnerable people.

In addition, while to flip the frames about the virus is not manipulative, this rhetorical move is surrounded by manipulation and lies. For instance, CN spreads fake news about masks, calling into question scientific evidence in order to reinforce doubts about its efficacy, as can be seen in the sentence below:

> (10) There is no conclusive evidence that the use of masks reduces the spread
>   of the Chinese virus. (CN 8-12-2020)[11]

The stratagem used here is very common in science denial. Climate change "skepticism" is a case in point. As Macyntire (2018, 20-1) puts it: "Although there is no particular debate over the question of whether the global temperature is rising and humans are the primary cause of it, the public has been hoodwinked into thinking that there is a great scientific controversy over this issue." As for the use of masks, there is also no scientific controversy (Saey 2020).

My point is not that the overall CN´s discourse is not manipulative. This discourse is an instance of hate speech, using lies and manipulation. My point is that, as far as the coronavirus is concerned, there is no manipulation, but persuasion.

In order to make clear the non-manipulative nature of the strategy of flipping the frames regarding the coronavirus, I will review the definitions proposed in the literature to draw the line between manipulation and persuasion and check how the strategy of flipping the frames should be categorized according to these definitions.

The following definitions are found in the literature:

i.   Manipulation is deception (Saussure 2005, Wood 2014, and Sorlin, 2016, 2017).
ii. Manipulation is devious, not fitting the rational means of persuasion (Saussure 2005, Rocci 2005, Van Eemeren 2005, Maillat 2013, and Wood 2014).
iii. Manipulation is abuse of power (Fairclough 1989, Van Dijk 2005, Wood 2014, Sorlin 2016, and Cabrejas-Peñuelas 2017).

Let´s check if these definitions apply to the strategy of flipping the frames, found in the corpus. The first definition (i) means that the

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[11] In Portuguese: não há evidências conclusivas de que o uso de máscaras reduza a disseminação do vírus chinês.

manipulator makes a deliberate attempt to conceal information in order to create in the hearer a belief that the speaker himself or herself knows to be false. This deliberate intention to deceive is not inherent to the kind of rhetorical strategy we´ve been studying. To flip the frames is to change from one to another construal of the same event, without denying the truth of the alternative frame. There is no covert falsehood, because both frames (the biological and the social ones) are respectful of the truth. So, the first definition (i) doesn´t apply.

The definition (ii) implies that the propositions expressed by the manipulator are devious or problematic at several levels. In manipulative discourses, the propositions are incoherent, contradictory or false, resulting in a truth-functionally defective discourse (Saussure 2005). Undoubtedly, many propositions about the coronavirus in the corpus are at least dubious, but they aren´t manipulative because they do not try to conceal an incoherence. The opinion expressed might be false, but the utterances are not incoherent, as we can see in the example (11) below:

> (11) The hysteria and panic created around the Chinese virus provided the context for the attack that globalists and communists are promoting against economies and against individual rights in the Western world. (CN 3-29-2020)[12]

This political opinion is over-the-top and rather absurd, but I contend that it is not manipulative. It is a transparent expression of a political view, without any hidden incoherence. It doesn´t derails from the rational means of persuasion, because it appeals to the hearer´s political beliefs. There is no way to consider that such utterances are truth-functionally defective. The fact that someone disagree with an opinion doesn´t mean that the opinion is irrational or manipulative. So, the definition (ii) doesn´t apply.

The definition (iii) implies that a manipulative discourse deprives the hearer from his/her capacity to freely achieve his/her own conclusions. Manipulation, in this sense, is a kind of social coercion (Fairclough 1989, Wood 2014, and Sorlin 2016, 2017). This coercion typically occurs whenever a powerful political group tries to impose its own interests upon the hearers (Cabrejas-Peñuelas 2017).

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[12] In Portuguese: A histeria e pânico criados em torno do vírus chinês serviram para ensejar o ambiente propício para o ataque que globalistas e comunistas estão promovendo contra as economias e contra as liberdades individuais no mundo ocidental