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Foreword

Interactions among languages, discourses, social practices and forms of life

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The *Gragoatá* journal has proposed a challenge to us: to organize a special issue based on subjects that are open enough to indeterminate the identities of areas and approaches. Such a challenge was an opportunity to take on different perspectives, such as those of contact, in-betweenness, contentions, interpenetrations, marked or not, explicit or not. In essence, those are points of view constitutive of academic reflection, but which, for being so tacit, do not always gain visibility as a central object of investigation.

We have allowed a flow of contributions to build up this special issue whose identity initially appeared opaque, but which gradually gained tone and brought to light its own bonds of coherence and interconnections. The texts that make up this special issue of *Gragoatá* come from different approaches and different ways of looking at language phenomena, which endorses the richness of a plurality of points of view and, at the same time, reveals a *devenir* that underlies the construction of meaning, organizes possible directions and designs the world and its forms of life.

Every article shows the strength and theoretical-methodological coherence of its approach, revealing at the same time the vulnerability of what is established

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as a clear circumscription before the intrusion of phenomena and their power of amalgamation in favor of a general direction.

The word “each” blew towards him and melted into the wind. Geryon had always had this problem: a word like “each”, when he looked at it, would break down into separate letters and go away. (Carson, 2017).

The fragility of the boundaries of “each” as opposed to the collective “whole” tensions and challenges approaches to take a position in relation to the interpenetrations inherent to any phenomenon, giving due importance to the movement of the act being carried out in the definition of identities, at the same time collective and individual, which gain in complexity when observed from the perspective of contacts.

This special issue proposes to discuss the interactions between cultural anchoring and linguistic supports, that is, the ecological margins (adaptation and exaptation, conformation and emancipation) among social practices and forms of life. Interactions are nothing but contact situations that challenge and, therefore, tension identities and values in a dynamic process of adjustment under which coexistence is established between a collective dimension and an individual sphere of exchanges. In this game, there is a dialectical relationship between the systemic organization of grammars and the patches, remedies and local negotiations to which practices and forms of life have to undergo to adapt to interactive situations that have both a complexity and an heterogeneity irreducible to prior coding. The critical gap between procedural grammaticalization and situationalization leads us to recognize the complementarity between general or theoretical skills and “field” skills. The collectivization of values is a never-ending task, which is the reason why the need for permanent social communication and the negotiation of constantly changing identity profiles are unequivocally imposed. Therefore, contributors to this special issue have been encouraged to address interactions of different natures, as well as contact processes and inescapable tension movements that are established between an original act and tacit knowledge, constituting poles among which degrees of permeability and contention are drawn that are based on the description of various border (or interface) phenomena described and analyzed by different spheres of knowledge.

In this introduction, we want to focus on two particular concepts - contact and syncretism - that have received little attention in semiotics, at least from the point of view of a specific dialectic, that between interaction and interpenetration.

Contacts and Syncretism

Compared to an interdiscursivity managed at a distance and through unilateral summoning enunciative acts of an alterity in dialogue, the interactions among languages, discourses, social practices and forms of life, when mobilizing texts, are characterized by co-presence and are incoactively aspectualized by *contact*. In this sense, in order to produce descriptions, we must take on the task of describing a progressive *interpenetration* among instances endowed with their own organization, which inevitably gives rise to mutual influences and bilateral structural rearrangements.

Contact has a completely paradoxical semiotic nature. On the one hand, between two entities in contact, there is no longer a middle ground, an “intermediate place” that would allow for an interpretative game and, therefore, an open semiosis: we leave space for body-to-body contact (more or less harmonious or conflictual) or for mental attunement. On the other hand, contact can be seen as the establishment of a possible communication channel, a sensitive structure – possibly “augmented” by technology – conducive to engaging in a genuine interaction. Even in this version, contact remains simply a preliminary condition for the exercise of languages, a notion on the threshold of semiotic relevance. However, underlying such a paradox in the notion of *contact* is the fear of establishing relationships with unknown or completely foreign cultures and peoples: coming into contact could be a spark for conflict or an opportunity for exchanges that could enrich the parties involved.

If, on the one hand, body-to-body contact is always invested with symbolic aspects, on the other, the more immediately available the channel, free of any technology, the more the feeling that semiotic means will not be sufficient to resist the sensitive impact of the encounter with otherness. Here lies the paradox of *contact*: too brutal to be considered semiotic, contact reveals all the effort that cultures dedicate to conceiving and justifying it; and, for being too surrounded by preliminaries and supports to prepare for communication, contact reveals itself to be already installed from the very start and open to reciprocal overexposure.

If contact is the macro-aspectualization of an encounter that can lead to dialogue or confrontation, it also deserves a procedural appreciation and a description anchored in the instances involved. Much has already been said about it in the communicative dynamics between enunciative instances, reducing it to a transmission channel and a phatic function, which guarantees the persistence of a mediating support (Jakobson, 1963). Sensory connection at a distance (for example, visual contact) is not yet a genuine interaction, as there is no transparency, in accessing the semantic level (Rastier, 1995), of the issues updated by co-presence. Furthermore, the environment is not indifferent to the possibility of effectively “channeling” communications. Whether contact can lead

to an encounter, a confrontation, or an indiscreet overexposure also depends on the configuration of the environment, actantial positions, practices, and contingent conditions. The implicated instances are also not reducible to embodied positions, since their space of presence extends far beyond the edges of their bodies, and the sensations of invasion suffered or intrusion carried out begin well before an approach and the establishment of a channel of functional communication. We immediately think of smells and perfumes that amplify the body into a sphere of presence, but gestural agentivity is also an intimate bubble of declared expressiveness.

Contact is, therefore, scripted within a given environment and composed of instances whose enclosure of presence is sensitive to pre-constituted, plural and, at times, contradictory symbolic stakes, starting with the floating enclosure that delineates the dynamics of presence, which is both vulnerable and strategically designed towards the other. The semantic configuration of contact is not only not transparent, like the simple appearance of a valid support for a plane of expression, but it also presents a complexity that comes from *forms of life*, the latter having various affective dispositions, actantial roles, negative faces and positive (Goffman, 1967).

In a semiotics of cultures, contact can not simply be the establishment of a communication channel, because co-presence in a given place is already enormously loaded with symbolic interests, to the point that, often, body-to-body contact begins well before a physical confrontation and, sometimes, the space for mutual interpretation can be denied even in the face of shared semiotic repertoires and competences. This also explains why semiotics has so vigorously opposed to the idea of “mental contact”, in which communicative understanding is achieved through the coincidence of interlocutors’ representational states, thus reducing linguistic mediations to scales that can be discarded once that the heights of shared thought have been achieved. On the contrary, abductions relating to the possible convergence of the interlocutors’ representational dynamics must be considered as subject to constant critical examination of the respectively imputed perceptual and enunciative positions and the semiotic manifestations that are produced and interpreted *in vivo*.

If communication is normally motivated by the need to renegotiate identity boundaries and by the attempt to resolve an asymmetry in the distribution and/or recognition of values implied in relationships, contact must be seen as a situation of co-presence that catalyzes symbolic aspects and not just as a support structure for interactions that are simply looking for a channel of expression. Furthermore, the search for a channel integrates and participates in the composition of symbolic aspects, beyond any purely instrumental perspective of semiotic resources.

Contact calls for a procedural description capable of accounting for the complexity of the dynamics that manage co-presence involved in peaceful or conflictual coexistence. This invites us to find the origins

of a relational history that is traced in the interferences among customs and, above all, in the mutual influences among the linguistic systems mobilized by the different groups involved. Contact may well be an inchoative phase of a coexistence of initially distant cultural forms of life, but which takes on a lasting thickness as soon as we move to descending integrations: from communication strategies of mutually recognizable and possibly negotiable symbolic aspects, we move to the slower process of adjusting the cohabitation between co-present practices that originate from distant traditions. Hybridizations or productive resistances among the genealogies of the production of objects and texts are the result of even slower processes that are increasingly less linked to the intentionality of the authors and, finally, it is the signs and their systems that register the borrowings and innovations. At the deepest semiotic level, that of sign systems, contact remains operational in the long term. It then becomes a framework for the rearticulation of cultural organizations, to the point that even the eventual fusion of cultures (integrated totality) easily leaves a vivid and stratified memory of all phases of previous coexistence.

In this way, languages remain in contact for a considerable period of time before folding into hybrid forms and ultimately changing into a new dominant language. Researchers in language contact propose models of evolution: for example, Peter Auer (1998) suggests that contact between languages gives rise to three successive phases: from code-switching to language mixing and then to fused lects, all forming a continuum, with overlaps and possible setbacks. Furthermore, a fused lect is an alternative result to the better-known cases of contact languages, such as pidgins and creoles, with the former being “emerging” languages for the unstable co-presence of distinct cultural groups and the latter already having some forms of institutionalization and native speakers. While creoles are seen as a possible evolution of pidgins, fused lects may originate from perfectly bilingual speakers who simultaneously incorporate two coexisting cultures (SCHMID, 2009). In fact, by mobilizing a fused lect, we increasingly pass from one language to another in the same sentence, without any hierarchical bias and without the sensation of code-switching.

The example of mixed languages and fused lects shows that systems can ultimately inherit a co-presence that life forms had to manage for a long time in everyday interactions (Schmidt, 2010) and, in the specific case, without achieving a syncretism that explores the logic of graft, which normally makes it possible to hierarchize cultural genealogies at deeper levels of relevance, with one playing the role of a beneficiary structure and the other of an implemented structure. In the case of fused lects, the bilinguals who were at the origin of a lasting and finally normalized co-presence of two languages in the same utterances seem to have mobilized the same “tact” in relation to two different cultural traditions. They transformed the memory of initial contact into a perception of coexistence (*cum-tactus*, “with tact”), which is no longer

seen as a catalyzing phase of other processes, but rather as an ideal condition and an end in itself. This limiting case makes us realize that the most typical manifestations of *interactant syncretism* always involve communicational asymmetries that can be transformed into systemic asymmetries, for example, according to a logic of organic graft – which is, at least, mutually “vital” – or, in the worst case, according to a policy of assimilation, typical of colonial enterprises. This shows us how delicate the issue of contact is and how easy it is to move from an ecology of coexisting life forms to a hegemonic grammar and ultimately to systemic assimilation. A diagram can help us visualize the semantic tensions that lie behind interactional syncretism, although two other decisive factors need to be taken into account: (i) the possibility of reversing asymmetric roles or balances; (ii) the different symbolic aspects that emerge as soon as interactional syncretisms are projected onto different planes of relevance, because, as we have seen, contact between systems of signs (languages) does not imply the same existential conditions and responses to duration as contact between life forms.

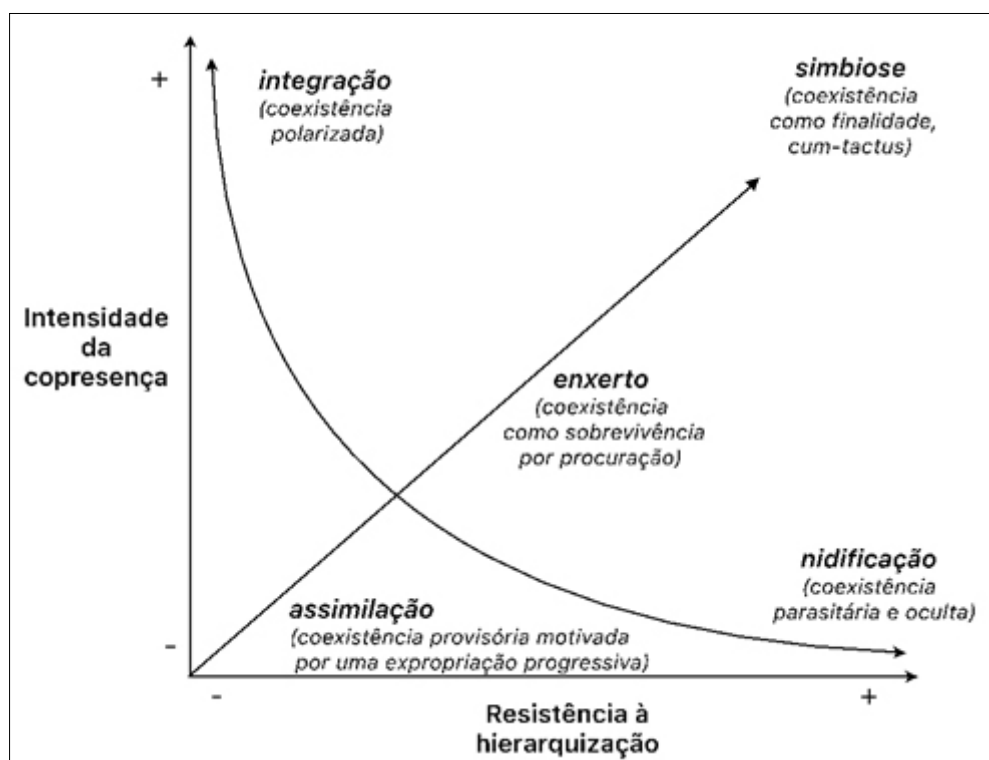


Figure 1. Tensive diagram of interactional syncretisms

Just as there are no absolute rules for linguistic change, there are no “absolute linguistic coercions for contact-induced change” (SIMONEN, 2013, p. 424). There are only policies to manage contact, but the long-term effects are not predictable. We can console ourselves with the idea that cultural miscegenation is, fortunately, an adventure that escapes

hegemony, but this does not stop us from taking responsibility and recommending compromises.

Interactions and Forms of Life

Interactions do not benefit from contacts, but provide them with a way and a set of opportunities to reach agreements that, in turn, allow for the preservation of something that can be shared at deeper and more stable levels of the cultural organizations involved. The circularity of the process is clear, as the form given to contact cultivates the hope that successive contacts will produce something that goes beyond the inter-individual memory of previous experiences, in other words, reliable strategies, grammars of praxis, normative texts and systems of signs.

Face-to-face interactions are episodic and difficult to systematize. They are framed by social systems, while putting these systems into critical perspective. Contacts in interactions with institutions provide specific catalysers, because either the former manage to problematize, or even dismantle, grammars and codified roles in order to re-open questions of meaning, or the latter frame and, ultimately, reabsorb statements within the pertinences and values of its own domain.

The “distance” between institutions and between social domains, motivated by the progressive search for autonomy, shows that, in a recursive way, a “mixture” emerges, a heterogeneity emerges in the social space and the “pidgins” of registers and modes of conversation intersect cultural spaces, each one being a little strange in its own country of origin.

We enjoy the fluidity of conversations and the rituals of greeting our neighbors just to escape the syncretism of roles and the heterogeneity of institutional places, as they regulate contacts between different forms of life. Homogenization is left, in depth, to the languages and norms of praxis, but interactional figures enter a scene that always contains controversial origins. Furthermore, the main *raison d’être* of semiotics as a discipline is the dissemination and management of syncretisms, of lines of contact that are paradoxically rearranged based on processes of singularization of actors, formation of new associations and tendencies towards the autonomy of social domains.

Interactions conceived mainly from different communicative fronts reveal, in fact, a whole series of coalescences, cooperations, sharing of semiotic resources and co-enunciations. Furthermore, the dialectics between contact and distancing is reproduced within psychic environments and in the plurality of internal instances that, at times, invite us to “get back in touch with ourselves”.

Among the interactions promoted and the interpenetrations experienced, forms of life are involved in more or less concentrated or diffuse enunciative activities, which makes it necessary to emphasize the claims of initiative, as well as demarcations and dissociations. Who is (un)available to assume tensive modulations, already catalyzed by co-presence, ready to be transformed into the predication of a modal front of

opposition, and who is more inclined (or not) to emancipate themselves and restructure syncretisms according to detachments, non-conflicting “privatizations”? Actors are always in contact with modal forces and underlying modulations, and their subjectivity is realized in discourse in a concessive way, as resistance and, maybe, emancipation.

Separated for being in contact, or in contact for being separated, social actors are constantly redesigning the commitments to which this chiasmic dialectic pushes them. Just like the movements of assimilation and dissimilation that are prototypical for semantics, the processes of dissociation and association reveal the issues at stake in life forms that are both in communication and in symbiosis at the same environment (even self-communication requires an internal critical front, that is, a pluralization of instances and, therefore, of perspectives, which cohabit in a psychic environment).

The fact that languages enable the management of a third meaning offers commensurability between the movements of dissociations/associations on external and internal fronts. It is a commensurability of attitudes, of treatments, which means that the result is never homogenization. This explains why we need to place emphasis on forms of syncretism, a concept that can be investigated by semiotics, essentially, as contact.

When we consider the communication channel, the sensory modalities involved, the shared technical supports, the identity faces in question are in syncretism, but their cohabitation cannot find a solution in a definitive integration. The same applies to the syncretism of languages in the same text. We aim at a significance plan on which all contributions can converge, but in reality each signifying component can critically “enter” the heterosemiotic cohabitation to interpret it in an associative or dissociative sense (e.g., music in films tends to create its own way of life in the soundtrack of cinematographic works).

We project on the life forms of objects the same possibility of maintaining together exclusive epicenters of enunciation (concentrated discursive initiative) and diffuse enunciative participations. The same work of art can promote an almost auratic difference and, at the same time, exemplify intentional patterns that characterize an entire culture. Idiolectal and sociolectal at the same time, the work of art is bilingual and claims both a zone of contact and distancing, an involving culture and a tense emancipation.

More generally, syncretisms invite us to think of interactions as always bilateral and without any definitive hierarchical resolution: what is defining can become instrumental and vice versa; what is involving can be involved, what interprets a text can be reinterpreted by that text.

Interactions need to be considered within a broader configuration of dynamics, in which face-to-face contact is only one possible figure,

largely unstable and driven by the temptations of hierarchization and situations of interpenetration to be restructured. Instead of imagining “contacts” as aligned according to a maximization of communicative efficiency (sensory, medial, cultural or mental contact) that would offer a univocal and shared referential structure, semiotics discovers and analyzes imperfective syncretisms that signal the need to resort to other compositions of forms of cohabitation, between interaction and interpenetration, contact and distancing, implication and emancipation.

An Incursion into the Authors’ Manuscripts

The manuscripts gathered in this special issue attest to the fertility of contacts, interactions (and possible interpenetrations?) and implications among different perspectives, highlighting an open reflection that, for this reason, is full of vitality while dealing with some of the issues we have just addressed.

This special issue of *Gragoatá* opens with the article entitled *Os tipos temáticos dos esquemas da prática e a topologia antroposemiótica*, by Jacques Fontanille (translated into Brazilian Portuguese by Gustavo Henrique Rodrigues de Castro and Matheus Nogueira Schwartzmann), which seeks to prefigure the thematic contents of semiotic practices in contact based on what he called “anthropic topology”, drawing on the ideas of Philippe Descola, Jakob von Uexküll, François Rastier, and Jean-Claude Coquet. Faced with a vast and synthetic thematic set (exchange, predation, donation, production, protection and transmission), which characterizes, for Descola (2005), individual and collective practices and interactions, Fontanille nuances his contents by projecting on them the difference between the properties of four entropic zones: endotopic, peritopic, paratopic, and utopian. Thus, the thematic typology gains a depth that goes from the closest, the identity of the operating actant, passes through its objective, which occupies the vicinity, and the distances and limits of the “world”, which concretizes its particular existence, and crosses a “beyond the horizon” border, that of an utopian zone that breaks and modulates its own mode of existence.

By discussing how “surprise” has guided semiotic discussions since the original Greimasian project, Luiz Tatit, in his article *Apreciação do sentido: o acento e as modulações do conteúdo*, refines the semiotic notion of accent, based on Ernest Cassirer, and explains how the tensive model of semiotic analysis, developed by Claude Zilberberg, weaves a well-founded reflection on the proposal of “content prosodization”. The author discusses how accents (most impactful moments) and modulations (tenuous moments) build a sensitive continuum with its ascendants and descendants underlying the most diverse texts, whether verbal, non-verbal or syncretic, thus meeting a huge sensitive demand imposed by contemporary texts, while at the same time establishing a link between different languages, a relevant topic for this dossier and for current semiotic analysis.

In her article *La forme de vie et le motif: comment penser la genealogie des tableaux?*, Marion Colas-Blaise jointly addresses “forms of life” and “motifs”, two broad issues in theories of language and aesthetic studies, to think about the affiliations between paintings, observing the mutations of their figurative elements, in a way to understand how the form of life of a painting is delimited and expanded. The discussion is based on contributions from philosophy (Deleuze, Benjamin, Wittgenstein), art theory (Panofsky, Goodman), semiotics (Fontanille, Basso Fossali and Colas-Blaise), and establishes a relationship between the philosophical concept of cultural games and the life forms of languages in pictorial works. Starting from an analysis of the works by the French painter Georges Laurent, the author proposes that the renewal of the plastic, figure and figurative components of the painting analyzed not only reveals that the genealogies of paintings and forms of life are linked to cultural games in their production and reception, but also institutes a re-enunciation of the chosen motives, suggesting that the creation of a work oscillates between the singularity of a creative gesture and a collective project, which, in turn, reveals a connection between different moments in the history of art.

In *Formas de vida wittgensteiniana e perspectivismo ameríndio: por uma linguística antropológica selvagem*, by Ana Paula El-Jaick, there is an initial theoretical effort to strengthen the relationship between Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language and the anthropological contributions of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in order to correlate the concept of “forms of life” with that of Amerindian “perspectivism”. The author seeks to extend the theoretical horizons of Language Studies to an interdisciplinary approach, in order to establish the pragmatic foundations in which, in language, subject and object define themselves and intersect with each other, thus creating the base form of the “wild anthropological linguistics” here proposed.

The Wittgensteinian concept of “forms of life” also underpins the discussion proposed by João Paulo da Silva and Evani Viotti in *A semiose como forma de vida: Interações em uma conversa sinalizada*. Starting with an analysis of excerpts extracted from a conversation in Brazilian sign language, the article highlights the process of semiosis that emerges from the intercorporeality and situatedness that characterize conversational practices in general. Their theoretical perspective focuses on the course of a face-to-face interaction and takes into account not only verbal signs (conventional manual or non-manual signs, for example), but everything that is involved in this process, such as reuse with transformations and cooperative actions, which endorse the idea inspired by Ingold (2000) and advanced by the authors that “all organisms inhabit each other’s actions”.

In *Saudades: toward a sociopoetics of diaspora, migration, & exiled writing*, Craig Saper proposes a radical incursion into the dynamics of

contacts, confrontations and the constitution of identities by bringing the experiences of the North American writing couple Bob Brown and Rose Brown to the Brazilian territory at the beginning of the 20th century. Both of them, who were major figures of the historical avant-garde, lived for more than 10 years in Brazil and were contemporaries of personalities such as Lévi-Strauss and Oswald de Andrade, having several themes of common interest. The text opens new research perspectives on the work of Bob Brown, avant-garde poetry and aspects of ethnology and cuisine in Brazil. It also highlights the work of the thinkers and artists mentioned, showing the relationships between their works and pointing to possible meetings and exchanges that could have happened, opening a possible field of research investigation in Brazil.

In order to investigate from a semiotic perspective the controversial interactions experienced by subjects during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, Marcelo Eduardo da Silva and Sueli Ramos da Silva, in *O convívio polêmico em meio à pandemia de Covid-19 – um olhar semiótico discursivo sobre as relações do Si com o Outro*, focus on the contact between the semiotic proposals by Claude Zilberberg and Erik Landowski to understand how the relationship between the Self and the Other occurs, in the sense of Jacques Fontanille, through an analysis of gradations of affection. The authors have analyzed text reports that talk about food delivery to homeless people, the creation of a booklet on health care in the Guarani language, a complaint made to the Court about racist comments regarding indigenous people, and a university extension project to welcome immigrants.

In the article *Interação fictiva como exemplificação em discurso direto: ensino-aprendizagem de português como língua estrangeira*, Luiz Fernando Matos Rocha and Jéssica da Costa Silva address some issues of contact between teacher and student discourse in the communicative settings of teaching and learning Portuguese as a foreign language. The authors seek to point out argumentation and explanation strategies based on instances of fictive interaction (FI). The framework of the article is descriptive, based on the theoretical-epistemological universe of cognitive linguistics, inspired by Talmy, Fillmore, Langacker, Fauconnier, among others. The article offers an analysis rich in inputs for teaching Portuguese as a foreign language.

Herbert Neves and Fábio Alves Prado de Barros Lima, in their article *O tempo e o espaço políticos: a integração entre argumentos marcada por advérbios dêiticos em entrevistas eleitorais*, analyze how deictic adverbs of time and space integrate argumentative strategies in interviews with candidates for mayor in the capital city of Recife, during the first electoral round of 2020. The authors have drawn on text linguistics (Koch, Bentes, Van Dijk, among others) to examine adverbs according to the intentions and contact of speakers within communicative situations. Their article

allows us to understand how deixis contributes to the manifestation of interactive purposes, as deictics begin to assume argumentative and opinionated roles, manifesting the interactive objectives of criticism, agreement or discursive redirection.

We hope that the dialogues opened by the welcome heterogeneity that constitutes the body of this dossier will inspire our readers to seek new fronts for productive exchanges.

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