"THIS ISSUE OF GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE IS A JOKE": NOTES AND REVERBERATIONS WHICH IMPLY HATE SPEECH ABOUT GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

"*PALHAÇADA ESSA QUESTÃO DE LINGUAGEM NEUTRA*": APONTAMENTOS E REVERBERAÇÕES QUE IMPLICAM NO DISCURSO DE ÓDIO SOBRE A LINGUAGEM NEUTRA

"ESTE TEMA DEL LENGUAJE NEUTRO ES UNA BROMA": NOTAS Y REVERBERACIONES QUE IMPLICAN DISCURSOS DE ODIO SOBRE EL LENGUAJE NEUTRO

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ABSTRACT: Immersed in the problematizations that the area of Applied Linguistics undertakes in relation to social language practices, the discussions in this text aim to point out comments from a publication, on a social network, about gender-neutral language and possible reverberations. To this end, we mobilize notions such as "hate speech" (Butler, 2021), "construction of meanings about non-binary language" (Melo; Paraíso, 2024), "language as a social phenomenon" (Rajagopalan, 2023), "online and offline experiences" (Signorini and Biondo, 2023) and gender-neutral language in debate (Barbosa Filho; Othero, 2022). Understanding qualitative research as a relevant principle for the discussions listed at this moment, we used netnography associated with an Instagram page, in the context of northeastern Brazil, which addresses social, political and cultural issues. In this sense, we understand that there are discourses that reproduce hegemonic ideological-partisan constructions that polarize and consequently highlight a set of attitudes that are intolerant of diversity and that, when amalgamated into extremist configurations, are associated with hate speech, often based on the understanding of the traditional grammar of Portuguese language as a political agenda.
KEYWORDS: Gender-neutral language. Hate speech. Social phenomenon. Instagram. Speech.

RESUMO: Imersas nas problematizações que empreendem a área da Linguística Aplicada em relação às práticas sociais de linguagem, as discussões neste texto objetivam apontar comentários de uma publicação, em uma rede social, sobre linguagem neutra e possíveis reverberações. Para tanto, mobilizamos noções da ordem do "discurso de ódio" (Butler, 2021), "construção de sentidos sobre linguagem não-binária" (Melo; Paraíso, 2024), "linguagem como fenômeno social" (Rajagopalan, 2023), "experiências *online* e *offline*" (Signorini; Biondo, 2023) e linguagem neutra em debate (Barbosa Filho; Othero , 2022). Entendendo a pesquisa qualitativa como princípio relevante para as discussões elencadas neste momento, servimo-nos da netnografia associada a uma página do *Instagram*, no contexto do nordeste brasileiro, que aborda questões sociais, políticas e culturais. Nesse sentido, compreendemos que há discursos que reproduzem construções ideológico-partidárias hegemônicas que polarizam e evidenciam, consequentemente, um conjunto de atitudes intolerantes às diversidades e que, amalgamados em configurações extremistas, associam-se ao discurso de ódio, alicerçados muitas vezes ao entendimento da gramática tradicional da língua portuguesa como agenda política.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Linguagem neutra. Discurso de ódio. Fenômeno social. Instagram. Discurso.

RESUMEN: Inmersas en las problematizaciones que el área de Lingüística Aplicada emprende en relación a las prácticas sociales del lenguaje, las discusiones en este texto tienen como objetivo señalar comentarios de una publicación, en una red social, sobre el lenguaje neutro y sus posibles reverberaciones. Para ello movilizamos nociones como "discurso de odio" (Butler, 2021), "construcción de significados sobre el lenguaje no binario" (Melo; Paraíso, 2024), "el lenguaje como fenómeno social" (Rajagopalan, 2023), "experiencias online y offline" (Signorini; Biondo, 2023) y lenguaje neutral en el debate (Barbosa Filho; Othero , 2022). Entendiendo la investigación cualitativa como un principio relevante para las discusiones enumeradas en este momento, utilizamos la netnografía asociada a una página de Instagram, en el contexto del noreste de Brasil, que aborda cuestiones sociales, políticas y culturales. En este sentido, entendemos que existen discursos que reproducen construcciones ideológico-partidistas hegemónicas que polarizan y en consecuencia resaltan un conjunto de actitudes intolerantes con la diversidad y que, al amalgamarse en configuraciones extremistas, se asocian a discursos de odio, muchas veces basados en la comprensión de la gramática tradicional de la lengua portuguesa como agenda política.
PALABRAS CLAVE: Lenguaje neutro. Discurso del odio. Fenómeno social. Instagram. Discurso.

1 INTRODUCTION

Rethinking the role of language and its implications in the social context means, above all, understanding that language processes, determined by all of us, are fluid and potent in various situations in which interaction is present. In this sense, we are talking about language processes in which movement and inconstancy are pillars for the construction of new understandings about it and from it. Thus, we assume, through the scope of language as action in the world, within the online-offline experiences which develop interactions on social networks, language as movement: a contemporary process among discourses.

Language events are multiple, according to Paiva (2019) and Santos Filho (2021), since all processes that indicate interaction in a social and political context can be taken into consideration as a backdrop for analyses and questions arising from Applied Linguistics

(AL). The contexts currently in the virtual/digital world directly address social issues, understanding that the dynamics of meaning are constituted by language phenomena in virtual environments on "social networks" (Leffa, 2016).

In this sense, seeking to establish a set of meanings in a post on the social network Instagram, on the *Cada Minuto* page, on February 9, 2024, referring to the prohibition of the use of neutral language in municipal schools in the city of Marechal Deodoro de Alagoas - northeastern Brazil, based on the comments in circulation in light of online-offline experiences, we developed a netnographic analysis, of qualitative research, aiming to understand the ideologies that surround the discourses regarding neutral language.

The discussions developed here are divided into Language and gender, Applied Linguistics as a political-social movement: methodology, online-offline experiences and hate speech: analysis and, finally, ongoing considerations.

2 LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Factually, until the beginning of the 20th century, gender was understood as a concept in itself, a category, a theoretical tool from the human and social sciences that aimed to understand the ways in which identities and social relations were constructed and reproduced in different cultures, based on inequalities between female and male.

The linguist Robin Lakoff, based on her work *Language and Woman's Place* (Lakoff, 1975), began her studies on language and gender by analyzing the conversational styles of men and women through the perspectives of difference, dominance, and deficit. As subsequent research progressed, it was noted that biological sex is not enough to explain the roles to be played by each individual. Lauretis (2019), when explaining the sex-gender system as a conceptual structure named by feminist social scientists, elucidates that cultural conceptions of masculinity and femininity are complementary, mutually exclusive, and classified within each culture. It is a social and cultural symbolic system that hierarchizes bodies and is always interconnected with political and economic factors. Furthermore, she argues that gender as a sexual difference ended up becoming a limitation, a deficiency of feminist thought.

Ostermann and Fontana (2010) point out that from the 1990s onwards, research began to challenge essentialist relationships between language and gender, as well as to investigate the complexities of *doing gender* through language (Butler, 1990; Stokoe, 1998; Bergvall, 1999). In Brazil, especially from the year 2000 onwards, it is noticeable that queer theories, sometimes antagonistic to feminist theories, have been approaching language studies. In some aspects, queer theories can be seen as a reaction to the identity politics of feminism (Livia; Hall, 1997) and in other aspects, it is worth noting that there is no "queer theory" in the singular (Hall, 2003). There are, however, several perspectives, sometimes overlapping and divergent from one another.

There is a need to discuss gender and sexuality norms, rethink the role of language, how identities are constituted and which of them are not covered by dominant forms of discourse - the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). In this scenario, Queer Linguistics has been criticizing how heteronormativity and cisgenderism are (re)produced or subverted in discursive practices. According to Borba (2015, p. 94),

> […] queer linguistics has been configured as an area of research that studies the semantic-pragmatic space between dominant discourses (i.e. heteronormativity) and situated linguistic performance and has thus shown itself to be a promising field for the study of how macro-sociological phenomena that produce certain individuals as abject, inferior or pathological beings are sustained and/or challenged in the most minute details of our social life, notably, language-in-use.

As Pennycook (2004) argues, identities are performed rather than preformed. Moita Lopes (2006) points out that the notion of performativity fills the gap in poststructuralist theory regarding the making of the subject. From a poststructuralist perspective, the subject is produced in discourse. Butler (2003, p. 53) explains that gender "is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts [i.e. performance] within a highly rigid regulatory structure, which crystallizes over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural kind of being [i.e. performativity]." According to Butler (2003), there is no referent for the self that precedes

the moment of discursive production. Performativity provides a way of thinking about language use and identity that escapes foundationalist categories, and it also provides the basis for understanding how languages are recreated.

It is in this process of recreating languages that gender-neutral language positions itself with its subversive character. Words carry with them stories of social transformations that cause changes in language, but changes in language also have the capacity to propose changes in social reality. The creation of the gender-neutral pronoun *ile*, by Pri Bertucci[1] and psychologist Andrea Zanella, in 2014, began an attempt in Brazil to think of a Portuguese language that encompasses the diverse ways of being and that considers, mainly, that non-binary (trans) people tend not to feel represented by the pronouns *ele* and *ela*, already present in the language. The Manifesto Ile for a Radically Inclusive Communication, posted on the Diversity BBox website in 2014, is an invitation to question norms, keep up with the times, and proposes a structural change in linguistic systems to avoid the erasure of performances and gender-based violence.

These acts of violence corroborate linguistic ideologies, i.e. "beliefs or feelings about languages as they are used in their social worlds" (Kroskrity, 2004, p. 498). The Portuguese language has been a space of political, linguistic and, above all, ideological tension. The notion of language shared by people who reject gender-neutral language is strongly supported by the linguistic ideology of the monoglot standard, as outlined by Silverstein (1996) and Milroy (2011). "One of the elements of this standard monoglot ideology is that believing in it is equivalent to a matter of common sense, after all, the standard, although it does not exist as a tangible thing, is an index of what is *desirable and morally good*." (Lopes and Silva, 2018, emphasis added).

Grounded in beliefs about what would be desirable and morally good for the entire population that communicates through the Portuguese language, politicians from parties that self-identify as conservative propose laws with the aim of denying any possibility of a gender-neutral language learning, especially in a school environment. Regarding bills against the use of gender-neutral language, Barbosa Filho (2022, p. 150, author's emphasis) points out that:

> Now, in these projects, 'defending the language' means defending both the 'standard norm' and things which go beyond it, such as 'traditional values'. It is in this broad field of criticism that gender-neutral language acquires an ideological character, a character that the projects attempt to denounce through linguistic arguments.

Therefore, we can see a strategy full of prejudice and intolerance on the part of the aforementioned groups of politicians, who defend a Portuguese language marked by sexism, by a hierarchy that privileges cisgender men and subordinates other social beings.

The post on the Instagram page of *Portal **Cada Minuto***, dated February 9, 2024, will be analyzed in this article. In it, the Portal announces the prohibition of gender-neutral language in municipal schools in Marechal Deodoro, in the state of Alagoas, through a law approved by the City Council and sanctioned by the mayor. Through the comments, it is possible to observe the linguistic ideologies that have been circulating through the reception of this news, as well as whether the voices of conservatism have gained strength in online-offline environments, understanding that we live in an overlapping of online and offline, becoming a unique experience.

3 APPLIED LINGUISTICS (AL) AS A POLITICAL-SOCIAL MOVEMENT: METHODOLOGY

When Rajagopalan (2023, p. 195) states that

> The applied linguist's perspective is just one of the approaches to language. As the applied linguist began to realize this, their gradual and progressive distancing from their "mother discipline" became inevitable. [...] the applied linguist feels obliged to put their scythe into other fields in search of concepts and categories that can help to understand the phenomena under their current focus.

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[1] Pri Bertucci is a non-binary person and activist of the LGBTQIAPN+ movement (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, *travestis*, transsexuals, transgenders, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, non-binary and other sexual orientations, identities and gender expressions that do not fit the cis-heteronormative standard)

We can understand that Professor Raja, as he is known in the academic-scientific field of language sciences, is academically and methodologically placing us as researchers committed to and "involved" (Souto Maior, 2023) with language phenomena, in which, given the circumstances of language practices, our lenses are clear for the focus in which the movements of action manifest themselves. According to the author's defense, it is up to the applied linguist to delve into other fields of knowledge in order to provide new implications regarding the phenomena to be analyzed/problematized.

According to the researcher, AL's detachment from its "mother discipline" highlights new research movements and methodologies in which the construction of knowledge is centered on the practices and achievements that languages demand in contemporary times. This detachment, which occurred a few decades ago in the field of research on language sciences, is now consolidated as an area of knowledge in which its research is committed to various levels of comprehension and understanding of social reality.

Politically and socially located in time and space, AL is, in the words of Souto Maior (2023, p. 74),

> […] implied by the discourse given, which is socially and historically situated, and establishes responsiveness in its speech, based on the themes of the studies themselves, the research problems, the people in the communities that make up the groups in the analyses, the making of the world described in the research and the meanings possibly unfolded throughout the academic productions.

Applied Linguistics' (AL) commitment revolves around the social, predominantly marking the political, where profusions of discourses and language processes are involved. As pointed out by the aforementioned applied linguist, we understand that research in this field, through the people and communities that are part of it, implies a sharpening of perspectives on the given reality, so that the various meanings in/throughout the world can be questioned and reconsidered. Detaching from the research of the early 1960s, which focused on language teaching—especially foreign language teaching—today research in the field of AL brings new perspectives and approaches to analysis, always seeking to relate the social with the political, the local with the global context, and the dynamics of interaction that languages provide, along with the implications of the regional with the people. These are perspectives and insights provided by researchers who, immersed in a given reality as part of it, construct possibilities for intervention to raise awareness or mitigate a social language phenomenon.

Methodologically, most applied linguists focus on qualitative research in which the process is considered the main point for analysis, leaving aside the results as the expected methods for completing the research. Thus, within the scope of contemporary AL research, in which boundaries are crossed, our objective is to point out comments on a publication on the social network Instagram, from a page with a large circulation in the state of Alagoas - Northeastern Brazil, about gender-neutral language and its possible social and political reverberations.

The discussions presented here, within the perspective of qualitative research and its developments involving the field of discourses and languages, according to Paiva (2019), based on the 'contemporary movements of circulation' (Leffa, 2016) produced by social networks today, are tied to questions and positions that align with an aversion to gender-neutral language. Drawing from the contemporary movements of circulation in which discourses occur, we use netnography as a theoretical-methodological framework for the construction and analysis of data, in order to establish a set of understandings surrounding discourses—in this case, the comments—with a deep connection to hate speech.

4 ONLINE-OFFLINE EXPERIENCES AND HATE SPEECH: ANALYSIS

Language, based on the social practices that determine its flow, is a set of actions and interactions through which models of understanding human life become possible. In this sense, language manifests/materializes in the realization of/for human life, as a process that develops continuously: language is ongoing and action. Thus, we can understand that it is fundamental to relationships in the process of construction, which, in this case, are the online-offline experiences: in the interactions made possible by social networks that shape language.

The interactions, understood here as language functionings in light of various comments on a post, indicate textual possibilities, which are language functionings, regarding opinions about a phenomenon: gender-neutral language in schools in a municipality in Alagoas. It is worth noting that our understanding of interaction is necessarily linked to the social manifestations that imply languages, which is considered a "social phenomenon" (Rajagopalan, 2023).

The "social phenomenon" which is/serves language and that, therefore, brings social, political, cultural and/or regional implications indicates that it promotes a construction of possibilities of (mis)understandings, (in)comprehensions and (re)interpretations, reiterating that it is not static nor is it alien to the contemporary functionings that are urgent today. The social, therefore, results, according to Signorini and Biondo (2023, p. 142) from characteristics that affect "embodied discussions of being and acting in the world".

In contemporary times, verbal interactions built on social networks are determined by discourses that bring ideological-partisan behaviors, loaded with comments/behaviors and actions that are consistent with multiple relationships, namely: sharing posts, sending messages and spreading ideas. The movement built on the logic of the web (the algorithms) of social networks focuses on immediate information and communication, that is, they are social mechanisms that exist on networks and are momentary and fluid given the dynamic nature of the information that is accessed.

Online-offline environments merge with various experiences in which language is constructed, so that when it comes to interaction on social networks and, particularly, talking about Instagram, texts (comments) are developed by value judgment mechanisms and that, generally, carry a significant load of "hate speech" or direct advocacy of violence, as we will see below. It is worth noting that the social network Instagram, although it has an internal policy against any mechanism that incites violence, still fails in the area of investigation and maintenance of its users who are not always punished, through blocking of their accounts, when they propagate any type of violence in the name of freedom of speech.

The *Cada Minuto* page has been on Instagram since 2018 as a news and media website with the theme "Official profile of the best news website in Alagoas". As of April 15, 2024, it had 16.3 thousand posts, 149 thousand followers and followed 786 other pages/profiles of followers. Inclined towards social, cultural, police, political and regional news, the page's moderators make daily posts with numerous themes, but the main emphasis is on political issues that revolve around the state, with a prevailing dynamic of criticism towards the state government.

Based on the political and social issues that outline the current scenario across the country, in relation to the growing far-right movement throughout Latin America and parts of Europe; in the state of Alagoas, a post was made on the @portalcadamin page on the social network Instagram, on February 9, 2024, with over 1,662 likes, regarding the prohibition of the use of gender-neutral language by an action taken by the mayor of the city of Marechal Deodoro (a metropolitan area of the state of Maceió), Cláudio Roberto Ayres da Costa from the MDB, as illustrated in image 1 below.

Image 1: Law: Gender-neutral language is prohibited in municipal school of Marechal Deodoro

Source: @portalcadamin (*Instagram*).

The possible crossings that social networks imply in the digital world (processes of interaction and sharing of ideas) consist of varied dynamics of construction of meanings, taking into account what Mollica and Batista (2015) warn about the "effects constructed and monitored on the web". When it comes to monitoring the constructions of virtual media, the movements of texts that circulate on the various social networks are continuous and fluid, given the diversity of themes and contextualization that are aimed at different audiences (Mollica and Batista, 2015).

In this sense, understanding the plural movements of texts that circulate on the networks, the post of February 9th of this year dialogues with a set of intentions that aim not only to delegitimize the importance of the use of gender-neutral language in educational spaces, such as schools, but above all to ignore the linguistic trends and pluralities that demand the use of language. This is not about pointing out the reasons for the prohibition that led to the publication of the ordinance originating from the city hall of Marechal Deodoro, but we highlight the "hate speeches" that reverberate in positions loaded with ignorance, associated with an "anti-progressive logic of discourse" – as will be discussed later.

Images 2 and 3: posts
Source: @portalcadamin (*Instagram*)

The worlds surrounding online-offline experiences of users connected to the social network Instagram, in relation to comments inclined towards hate speech, circulate on social media, especially when understood as manifestations of opinions regarding the maxim of "freedom of speech". In this sense, discourses resembling hate speech, according to Butler (2021), are masked as freedom of speech, where, leaning towards the understanding of the far-right, they proliferate violence, intolerance, and misunderstanding—in the name of a truth associated with the normative grammar of the Portuguese language—as an absolute regime of truth when it comes to gender-neutral language.

In the case of image 2, we notice that the discourse game functions as a rising movement that is constructed from the realities experienced in the Brazilian political scenario. There are discursive clashes that are detailed between users with the aim of highlighting the political aspect: in the last comments, there is an appealing reinforcement about politics at the presidential level – *Tem alguma notícia sobre o vídeo do golpe a democracia??? Uma reunião com o presidente em 2022 com ministros e generais???* (Do you have any news about the video of the coup against democracy??? A meeting with the president in 2022 with ministers and generals???). Here we see an example referring to the coup[2] that Brazil suffered on January 8, 2023, as well as a reference to the moments of meetings in which the former president held with his team composed of ministers and generals.

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[2] Supporters of the former president, with ideas and behaviors centered on the far-right, invaded and vandalized the headquarters of the three branches of government in Brasília, as a negative response to the victory of a representative of the people of the Workers' Party (PT), the current president of the republic of Brazil Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, from the left, who won the elections in 2022 legitimately and democratically.

Next, we come across another comment-response – *Tem do ex presidiário roubando o Brasil com vários ministros dele preso* (There is a former prisoner robbing Brazil with several of his ministers in prison) – which politically critiques a moment in history in when the current president suffered reprisals due to political investigations against his actions. Furthermore, the comment-response, as a behavior that aligns with the right, reveals a movement that does not understand the importance of using gender-neutral language and distances itself from ideas that may be related to social and cultural actions from a progressive perspective.

Still in Image 2, the first comments register, in a certain way, a lack of knowledge about gender-neutral language, directing observations that are interconnected with hate speech. After all, hate speech is also pejoratively masked in jocular mechanisms, as in the excerpt – *Essa palhaçada por diante kkkkkk* (This clowning around and so forth lol) – in which the association with laughter symbolizes the lack of knowledge about the subject. Hate speech, associated with the set of relations about gender-neutral language, configures a set of actions that can be questioned in – Instead of *"todos"*, they say *"todes"*, *"ovos"*, *"oves"*, *"meninos"*, *"menines"*... – extolling a total lack of knowledge and, consequently, distance about the political and social use of the linguistic resources of gender-neutral language.

In the case of image 3, specifically addressing gender issues, we notice that there is a game process in dispute in which all the comments corroborate socially marked ideas, namely: fragile masculinity (first comment), ideology of the "school without a party" (second comment), concern for the city (third comment) and the idea of normative grammar as legitimate for teaching (fourth comment). Although the comments involve issues that are separated, at first, in the discussions, the discursive notes about gender-neutral language go together, thus involving, according to linguists Melo and Paraíso (2024), several political-ideological positions.

The aforementioned authors provide an interesting overview of the meanings that are used in non-binary language in Brazilian bills, involving social, political and regional aspects that are confused with the demands of intolerance that are on the uses of this language in its linguistic resources. They bring the following discussion in light of the justifications of the bills, which "[t]hese arguments serve as a smokescreen for the old silencing posture of a traditional society regarding avant-garde political groups in the gender and sexuality dissidence, such as non-binary transgender individuals—target identity in the production and re-elaboration of the GNL in the projects analyzed here" (Melo; Paraíso, 2024, p. 269).

In an attempt to understand how issues that prevent the use of gender-neutral language work in various spaces, but especially in schools, linguists take a necessary stance in order to clarify that society is in the process of understanding sexual and gender dissidences and that people need to be understood in their subjectivities. Conservatism encompasses a set of behaviors and methods/attitudes that exclusively target the traditional family and the understanding of good customs, that is, everything that goes against the understanding of family within its morality must be excluded and annihilated, as Butler (2021) emphasizes.

The comments on image 3, more precisely the second and fourth, reinforce ideas of conservatism: (a) establishing the idea of traditional education (leaving aside several progressive issues that are interpreted as an apology for something) and (b) understanding the idea of inclusive education to the detriment of gender-neutral language. We can understand that the construction of hate speech, in light of the issues that imply the use of new linguistic resources such as gender-neutral language, is related to a movement of exclusion and, at times, ignorance on the part of those who hate it.

The dynamics constructed in the comments of image 3 skew possible understandings about the social configuration in which society finds itself, valuing traditional beliefs (*Escola e lugar de informações positivas* [sic] - School (is) place for positive information): second comment and (*acho um desserviço à língua portuguesa* - I think it's a disservice to the Portuguese language): fourth comment. Barbosa Filho and Othero [et al.] (2022), committed to discussions regarding gender-neutral language in schools, understand that the positions regarding its uses are legitimate and constant in society, valuing aspects of inclusion and understanding of people who have been historically forgotten and intentionally sidelined.

In this regard, we observe images 4 and 5 which endorse various mechanisms of intolerance and total lack of knowledge about the use of gender-neutral language.
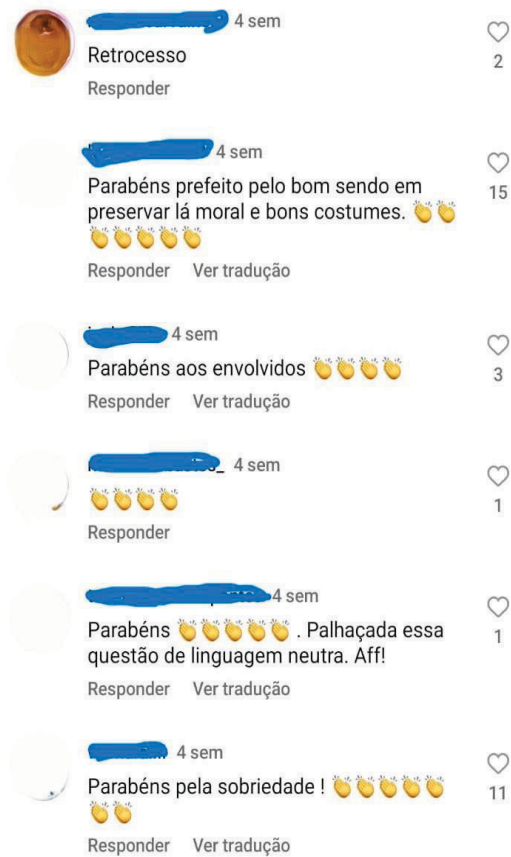
Images 4 and 5 : posts
Source: @portalcadamin (*Instagram*)

Given the effects that are produced and masked by hate speech, we notice that in image 4 there is explicit authorization and endorsement for the mayor, through semiotic resources (the applause), which serves to legitimize the idea of prohibiting the use of neutral language, which is understood as a *"retrocesso"* (step backwards): first comment. We understand that this is a political construction that biases the discussion about possible gender markers, which indicate social relations of interpretation and reinforcement grouping, that is, as comments against gender-neutral language are posted, there are several reinforcements that add to the idea of aversion.

Despite the support and authorization of the mayor's action, we still understand that some comments distance themselves from ideas opposed to the use of gender-neutral language, seeing it as an authoritarian-dictatorial stance toward the organic movement of language usage. The fifth comment, still in image 4, highlights an interesting movement underlying the idea of ridicule: "*Palhaçada essa questão de linguagem neutra. Aff!*" (This gender-neutral language issue is a joke. Ugh!), as if the association with the use of the language corresponded socially to the ridiculous, humorous, or comical. However, we understand that it is a political and social activist use, which highlights the existence of active and critical people within and accross the world.

Santos Filho (2021, p. 1273), raising discussions about gender-neutral language in academic writing and conducting a conceptual overview of the discursive movements that affect the mechanisms of language, reflects on its various uses and asserts that it is necessary to "provoke certain/urgent shifts in meaning, acting on the microphysics of the power structures in scientific discourse, in order to generate knowledge for all". The author, understanding the forces surrounding scientific discourse in the construction of power relations within the academic environment, argues that the movement of language is marked by mechanisms and behaviors of fluidity, endorsing the social and meaningful construction that language possesses.

The shifts in meaning that may be generated in the comments of the image in question, on one hand, indicate a deepening in the individualization of social effects related to gender causes and, on the other, correspond, as Barbosa Filho and Othero *et al.* (2022) reflect, to positions of total aversion toward people who do not fit into cis-heteronormativity. The debate is important and necessary because it sheds light on the empathetic construction of thinking that, through a symbolic game of languages in which people are immersed, we can establish criteria of meaning for people who do not hegemonically belong to a certain group and whose existence and actions in the world can be recognized as significant through language. It is through language that people and things exist.

In image 5, considering the reflections of Barbosa Filho and Othero *et al.* (2022) regarding the mechanisms that guide the dynamics of meaning around the use of gender-neutral language, we reflect on the comments posted that, categorically, show a marked fear of using such language. Taking into account that discursive-bodily behaviors are established by rhetorical reinforcements that discredit gender-neutral language, such as: *"Todes estão com medo kkkkkk"* (Everyone is scared lol): third comment, *"Que retrocesso sem sentido!"* (What a nonsense setback!): fifth comment, and *"Ótimo!!! Não tem pra quê essa frescura"* (Great!!! No need for these frills): sixth comment, we again observe that a lack of basic knowledge is present in the comments.

Images 5 and 6: posts
Source: @portalcadamin (*Instagram*)

We understand that the comments are constructed ideologically and, therefore, come from an anti-progressive logic of discourse, that is, they indicate a movement that is conceived from the lack of knowledge, dialoguing with ideas that function as a discursive tripod of the far-right, in a way that allows for the functioning of ideas and behaviors that do not allow for margins for the social. In this case, we understand that the anti-progressive logic of the discourse goes against the social and political mechanism that is constructed by groups considered social minorities.

Within the understanding of the anti-progressive logic of discourse, we note its presence in images 6 and 7, in a way that implies operations that are far from what we believe to be legitimate and possible for the possible uses of languages. In this way, the comments on the images corroborate positions that highlight actions in/around the world, raising forces that have gained proportion in all regions of Brazil and, more precisely in the Northeast, as a response against the liberal movement in politics.

In image 6, revisiting the media links that emerge from social media interactions analyzed by Mollica and Batista (2015), as discursive constructions of linguistic and semiotic phenomena, the discursive-bodily relationships found in the comments imply constructions that distance themselves from time and space, such as: *"devia ser proibida em todo o território nacional."* (It should be banned nationwide.): first comment; *"Foi uma utilidade pública fascinante kkkkkkkk..."* (It was a fascinating public service lol…): second comment; *"Deveria ser proibido no mundo inteiro"* (It should be banned worldwide): third comment; *"Parabéns prefeito..."* (Congratulations, mayor…): fifth comment. The discursive-bodily relationships extend into the field of discourse in a movement that dialogues with the social imagination and, at the same time, transcends the limits of the body—"national territory", "banned worldwide", and "congratulations, mayor"—that is, these are ideas that prioritize individual thought over collective or other-centered thinking.

In image 7, still in relation to what Mollica and Batista (2015) discuss regarding interactions in virtual social media environments, we can note that the first comment, "*a rapidez com que as informações chegam ao nosso conhecimento é bom, no entanto, esse tema de linguagem neutra e outras asneiras é de uma imbecilidade que só quem cai nessa é alguns doentes também.*" (The speed with which information reaches us is good; however, this topic of gender-neutral language and other nonsense is such stupidity that only some sick people fall for it), filled with offensive discourse, recognizes that information is fluid, but the discursive game of hate is activated as a means of delegitimizing the identities of trans or non-binary people. Engaging with both public and private spheres in the context of contemporary discourse, gender-neutral language seeks to provide visibility to existences, indicating linguistic-identity representations.

The last comment in the image, "*Marechal para TodEs*", once again highlights a political and social misunderstanding regarding gender-neutral language, reducing it to a nominal form. According to Santos Filho (2021), there are many other possibilities and structures that exemplify the use of gender-neutral language in Portuguese, such as: the use of indefinite pronouns (*ume, umes*); the use of definite pronouns (*le, les*); marking of two genders with masculine zero in the plural (*professories*); marking of two genders with inflection (*outres*); and referencing non-binary individuals (*elu*), and so on.

What we can observe in the discursive constructions related to the post about the prohibition of gender-neutral language in the schools of the municipality of Marechal Deodoro is that the collective ignorance of most people interacting on the @portalcadamin page regarding the dynamic nature of language, coupled with ideologies rooted in hate speech, consequently and intentionally fosters a set of intolerant attitudes. Bagno (2019, p. 16) states that "Every way of speaking is worth gold in the fight against fascism". In this case, we understand that the various possibilities of developing language mechanisms serve as political tools and structures against forms of intolerance: sexism, misogyny, femicide, ageism, LGBTphobia, fascism, and many other forms of intolerance.

5 ONGOING CONSIDERATIONS

Considering the sets of analysis developed here, without intending to exhaust the infinite possibilities that were left aside, we understand what Leffa (2016, p. 139) discusses about the information involved in the dynamics of social media, within the understanding of language teaching, as 'authentic metalinguistic interaction', in a way that provides multiple forms of knowledge. In this sense, the movements involving social media in contemporary times, amid the explosion of circulating news, are shaped by constant interactions, with users being constantly addressed by information arriving at all times.

The digital and technological universes are moving towards new text strategies and, consequently, towards new discussions that can be understood as necessary today, since the dynamics of the digital world are fluid and continuous when it comes to the ideological propagation of ideas and information. There is multiple knowledge (knowledge from different areas as well as references to the Global South as a political and social position) that can be linked to teaching as a way of minimizing and softening ideas and behaviors considered strategically and culturally conservative, in a way that emphasizes people and social groups in situations of social and political vulnerability.

Through Silva Lima (2022), in a proposal for teaching Portuguese focused on the perspective of diversity in gender studies, according to the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), discussions about teaching Portuguese with the social practices of language and with the diversities that ensure the official document are centered on a set of representations, in which understanding of teaching revolves around the "protagonism of students as emerging in the field of diversity" (Silva Lima, 2022, p. 240). The particular context of teaching Portuguese can be (re)signified and (re)thought as spaces for debate and construction of meanings in relation to the perspective of gender studies, considering that the demands that students bring to school are many and, one of them – undoubtedly – is the necessary discussion about sexualities, genders, normativities, concepts of family, intolerances placed in the world, shared meanings as a standard, and so on.

Thus, based on the multiple meanings constructed in light of neutral language, in spaces of construction/interaction, we can highlight the need for more knowledge and debate that can foster dynamics of meaning regarding the realms of gender-neutral language use. Furthermore, the knowledge that underscores the use of gender-neutral language is centered on empathetic behaviors aimed at promoting inclusion and equity, because, when discussing socially excluded individuals, we can determine that the use of the previously mentioned linguistic resources needs to be implemented in our social practices.

The use of language is far from being a joke, as seen in one of the comments, unless it is aimed at explaining some linguistic phenomenon where laughter is the focus, which is not the case here. It also should not be regarded with disdain by either the school or society, as the representations of people and social groups are evident in all their contexts. Therefore, more than ever, we need to understand and defend the diverse uses and levels of language in order to build a less prejudiced and more egalitarian society for all of us.

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