#*CANCELADA*: A CULTURE OF BOYCOTT CONVEYED BY IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES

#*CANCELADA*: UMA CULTURA DO BOICOTE VEICULADA POR ESTRATÉGIAS DE IMPOLIDEZ

#*CANCELADA*: UNA CULTURA DEL BOICOT VEHICULADA POR ESTRATEGIAS DE DESCORTESÍA

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ABSTRACT: This research aims to analyze how internet users, in online-mediated interactions on the social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*), employed linguistic-discursive resources that would suggest the cancellation of the artist Thaila Ayala, by reducing interlocutive distance and constructing metapragmatics of impoliteness. In the theoretical scope, we assume that cancel culture involves impolite language actions at the micro (impoliteness strategies), macro (establishment of violent metapragmatics), and meso levels (regulation of interlocutive instances for violence), guided by the intersection of Interactional Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics. In the methodological scope, we selected one post from G1 and seven comments related to the cancellation of the artist Thaila Ayala, under the guidance of (N)etnography and Critical Discourse Analysis. In the analytical scope, we observed that irony, derogatory rhetorical questions, pejorative adjectives, distinct insinuations, and various grammatical-textual uses, as violent linguistic-discursive strategies, emerged from a (meta)discursive struggle between the artist (cancelled) and the internet users (cancellers), forming a unit of meaning that framed the cancellation as a kind of pursuit of social justice.
KEYWORDS: Cancellation culture. Linguistic-discursive violence. Impoliteness. Digital social networks.

RESUMO: Esta pesquisa visa analisar de que modo internautas, em interações mediadas on-line na rede social *X* (antigo *Twitter*), mobilizaram recursos linguístico-discursivos que, ao reduzirem a distância interlocutiva e ao construírem metapragmáticas de impolidez, sugeririam o cancelamento da artista Thaila Ayala. No âmbito teórico, assumimos, à luz da interface da Sociolinguística Interacional e da Pragmática, que a cultura de cancelamento prevê ações de língua(gem) impolidas nos níveis micro (estratégias de

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impolidez), macro (estabelecimento de metapragmáticas violentas) e meso (regulação das instâncias interlocutivas para violentar). No âmbito metodológico, selecionamos, sob a orientação da (N)etnografia e da Análise de Discurso Crítica, uma postagem do G1 e sete comentários relacionados ao cancelamento da artista Thaila Ayala. No âmbito analítico, constatamos que as ironias, as perguntas retóricas desvalorizadoras, as adjetivações pejorativas, as insinuações distintas e os usos gramático-textuais diversos, como estratégias linguístico-discursivas violentas, emergiram de uma luta (meta)discursiva entre a artista (cancelada) e os/as internautas (canceladores/as), formando uma unidade de sentido que enquadrou o cancelamento como uma espécie de busca por justiça social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cultura de cancelamento. Violência linguístico-discursiva. Impolidez. Redes sociais digitais.

RESUMEN: Esta investigación tiene como objetivo analizar cómo los internautas, en interacciones mediadas en línea en la red social *X* (anteriormente *Twitter*), emplearon recursos lingüístico-discursivos que, al reducir la distancia interlocutiva y construir metapragmáticas de impolidez, sugerirían el cancelamiento de la artista Thaila Ayala. En el ámbito teórico, asumimos, a la luz de la intersección de la Sociolingüística Interaccional y la Pragmática, que la cultura de cancelamiento implica acciones lingüísticas descorteses en los niveles micro (estrategias de impolidez), macro (establecimiento de metapragmáticas violentas) y meso (regulación de instancias interlocutivas para la violencia). En el ámbito metodológico, seleccionamos, bajo la orientación de la (N)etnografía y el Análisis Crítico del Discurso, una publicación de G1 y siete comentarios relacionados con el cancelamiento de la artista Thaila Ayala. En el ámbito analítico, observamos que la ironía, las preguntas retóricas desvalorizadoras, los adjetivos peyorativos, las insinuaciones distintas y los usos gramático-textuales diversos, como estrategias lingüístico-discursivas violentas, surgieron de una lucha (meta)discursiva entre la artista (cancelada) y los internautas (canceladores), formando una unidad de sentido que enmarcó la cancelación como una especie de búsqueda de justicia social.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cultura de la cancelación. Violencia lingüístico-discursiva. Descortesía. Redes sociales digitales.

1 INITIAL REMARKS

Online-mediated interactions (Thompson, 2018) commonly emerge from the space of digital social networks, where the negotiation of meanings takes place amid a complex network of interpersonal relationships and sociocultural references (Santaella, 2014; Kramsch, 1998). In this space, increasingly open to the participation of internet users, subjects form communities according to their own beliefs, which are shared through publication and reaction to public posts on social networks; and the interaction patterns that emerge in these communities allow them to have their own social organization (Clark, 2015; Santaella; Lemos, 2010). In Brazil, there are approximately 150 million users of digital social networks, with an increase of 10 million interactants between 2020 and 2021 (Kemp, 2021). Souza (2023, n/p) estimates that in Brazil, there are "[...] more than 181 million people online in the country, which corresponds to 85% of the population".

This virtual interaction space has also witnessed an increase in the frequency of boycotts against artists, the current form of which has been called *cancel culture*. For some perspectives, social actors/actresses would seek to oppress and do violence, while for others, they would seek to pursue social justice and persuade, through this sociocultural practice. It is important to highlight that two factors contributed to the cancellation of artists. The first factor is the increase in the flow of online-mediated interactions between 2020 and 2021 (including because of social isolation measures justified by the Covid-19 pandemic). In this context of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is worth noting that the increase in online-mediated interactions in Brazil was accompanied by the intensification not only of political polarization but also of the country's structural inequalities (Paula *et al.*, 2023), establishing violent scenarios.

The second factor is the transparency of social networks, which could initially cause some estrangement, as social networks are not inherently transparent. On the contrary, algorithms tend to operate according to the policies of the corporations to which they are linked, and according to Alves & Andrade (2021), they can trigger algorithmic opacity[1]. Although this debate is undeniably relevant, our interest lies in discussing transparency beyond this traditional concept situated in a positive view, as an element of responsibility.

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[1] According to Alves & Andrade (2021, p. 368), algorithmic opacity can trigger outcomes that "[...] may have relevant individual or collective repercussions, based on assessments related to race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity capable of generating systematic discriminations".

Thus, we refer to transparency in line with Han's proposal (2013), as a social phenomenon characterized by excessive visibility and exposure of personal information on social networks. This can result in psychological, moral, social, and interactional implications, sometimes linked to self-censorship, social pressure, and (in our view) linguistic-discursive violence.

Emerging from the context of online-mediated interaction in times of pandemic, these two factors contribute to making language actions associated with cancellation even more visible, in line with what happened with the artist Thaila Ayala. Inscribed at the interface of Interactional Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics, this research aims to analyze how internet users, in online-mediated interactions on the social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*), employed linguistic-discursive resources that would suggest the cancellation of the artist Thaila Ayala, by reducing interlocutive distance and constructing impoliteness metapragmatics. Next, we will present our concept of (im)politeness (and the perspectives that contribute to this construction), as well as the notions of metapragmatics and linguistic-discursive proxemics.

The first-wave (im)politeness studies (Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Brown; Levinson, 1987; Culpeper, 1996) adopted a Gricean approach (linguistic/micro), which envisioned a set of universal/cross-cultural (im)politeness strategies/maxims/rules aligned with face needs – the interactants mutual desire to maintain an approved social image (Goffman, 1967). These strategies/maxims/rules were analyzed from an ethical perspective (the researcher's viewpoint). In combating the centrality given to analyzes conducted at the phrasal level and from an ethical perspective, the second-wave (im)politeness studies (Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2009) founded a postmodern approach (sociodiscursive/macro), focusing on the emic perspective (the participant's viewpoint) and the emergence of (im)politeness in sociodiscursive struggles (Watts, 2009; Culpeper, 2011). The third-wave (im)politeness studies (Terkourafi, 2005; Arundale, 2006; Haugh, 2007b; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2009; Grainger, 2011; Culpeper, 2011; Kádár; Haugh, 2013) proposed an sociointeractional approach (sociointeractional/meso). This approach aims to recover the linguistic component lost in the second wave as well as position (im)politeness as a sociointeractional achievement, rather than a product of the *speaker's intention versus listener's interpretation* dichotomy (Grainger, 2011).

From this convergence (and successive epistemic turns), we conceive that (im)politeness is instantiated in interaction – a kind of interpersonal attitude (Haugh, 2007a) –through (im)politeness strategies negotiated by the interactants involved in a particular sociocultural practice. The meanings are constructed from the context in which these strategies are framed, including metapragmatics that emerge from (meta)discursive struggles and proxemic negotiation. Metapragmatics are regulated by "[...] sociocultural processes of a linguistic-discursive and political-ideological nature [...]" (Signorini, 2008, p. 117), with the function "[...] of both describing and evaluating as well as conditioning and guiding language use in oral, written [and digital] interaction" (Signorini, 2008, p. 117 – added by us). Linguistic-discursive proxemics concerns the intersubjective regulations negotiated by interactants in verbal and non-verbal domains (Albuquerque; Muniz, 2022), so that both reduction and distancing can signal more/less violent actions.

In addition to the initial remarks and the final remarks of this research, we will articulate – in the theoretical section – the concepts of online-mediated interaction, hypervisibility, cancel culture, (im)politeness, metapragmatics, and linguistic-discursive proxemics. Following this theoretical path, we will arrive – in the methodological section – at the study framework, from which we will outline the procedures adopted in generating data, guided by (N)etnography and Critical Discourse Analysis. Subsequently, we will – in the analytical section – analyze the interactions that suggest the artist's cancellation on *X*.

2 IMPOLITENESS IN INTERACTION INSTANCES: METAPRAGMATICS OF CANCELLATION

Our constant involvement in the virtual world is sufficient to recognize that different interlocutory nuances emerge from this encounter, distinct from those arising in oral and written interactions. Online-mediated interaction involves an extended space-time constitution in both space and time; a limited range of symbolic cues; a degree of dialogical interactivity; and an orientation of action from many to many (Thompson, 2018). This dynamic – a result of the new communication paradigms and the mobility of 3.0 social networks (Santaella; Lemos, 2010) – allows the dissemination of information in a constant (and almost instantaneous)

flow and reduces the distance between famous people and anonymous people, who are hyper-observed as public users of social networks.

In online-mediated interactions, we must consider that everyone is susceptible to hypervisibility. This interactional status contributes to breaking down the boundaries between public and private, so that exposure, transparency[2], and hypervisibility in digital media can favor "[...] disrespectful, violent, and discriminatory practices towards certain social groups [...]" (Abreu, 2015, p. 198). Such groups may manifest through impoliteness strategies capable of simultaneously attacking the interactants' face, reducing interlocutory distance between such interactants to attack, and regiment metapragmatic harmful to the social actors/actresses enrolled in a given sociointeractional framework.

As the driving force behind cybercultures (Abreu, 2015), hypervisibility is based on the maxim *I update, therefore I exist* (Keen, 2012), in which each subject positions him/herself as his/her own advertising object, belonging to a society where "[...] everything is turned over, discovered, stripped and exposed" (Han, 2013, p. 29). Interactions, in turn, take place in a "[...] completely transparent world, [where] we are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere" (Keen, 2012, p. 22). In this sense, social media, such as *X*, is not very social, as "despite all its community promises, it divides us instead of bringing us together" (Keen, 2012, p. 77), and often serves exclusively capitalist interests.

On digital social networks, the most prominent form of punishment imposed by communities is cancellation. *Black Twitter*[3] pioneered what we now call *cancel culture*, which involves the use of increasingly prominent persuasive tactics on the internet by a group of people (usually less powerful) seeking to combat the ignorance or malevolence of people who seem untouchable (Brown, 2021). In the literature, we find at least three trends on the topic: negative, neutral, and positive (Brown, 2021). As we assume there is no neutral perspective, we advocate for the existence of two perspectives, strongly inspired by Brown (2021). The first is unfavorable to cancel culture, arguing that it is associated with oppression, surveillance, punishment, and humiliation; and the second is favorable to cancel culture, associating it with persuasive tools and social justice, especially for socially marginalized groups.

In the first perspective, we position Saint-Louis (2021), who inspired us to explore two discussions highlighted in his text by consulting the original texts cited by him: online shaming and privacy (Laidlaw, 2017); and surveillance of the few by the many in cancel (or "call-out") culture (Tucker, 2018). In her work, Laidlaw (2017) associates online shaming with vigilantism, moral harassment (or cyberbullying), intolerance, and snooping. She (2017) examines online shaming from the perspective of privacy – the link with dignity, the right in public places, and the social dimension – with the aim of fostering a debate around the limits between humbling (knocking down someone for a specific social transgression) and humiliation (affronting dignity and destroying someone). On the other hand, Tucker (2018) emphasizes that the criticisms directed at cancel culture generally relate to a witch-hunt, where prior accusations would prioritize punishment (rather than rehabilitation) without any minimal exploratory discussion. From this perspective, this culture had an initial conception of internet activism with an educational function for society, but it has become a counterproductive technology of surveillance, punishment, and reporting (Tucker, 2018).

In the transition between these perspectives, we know that internet users commonly make their assessments between positive and negative trends. In this regard, Brown (2021) emphasizes that cancel culture, as a persuasive tool aiming to change public opinion about socially conflicting values, should not be labeled as positive or negative. Brown (2021) argues that evaluating such a tool based on this dichotomy is not appropriate; instead, its utility in a given situation should be considered. It is not uncommon for the media to combat these social practices, under the argument of attacking freedom of expression (Brown, 2021) and under the premise that "what starts on *Twitter* does not necessarily stay on *Twitter*" (Norris, 2021, p. 4), given the strong interest in viral posts that often generate media coverage. Hence, such practices would tend to delegitimize cancel culture, leading to a negative label for the term. In line with this second perspective, Clark (2020) highlights a narrative of moral panic regarding cancellation, associating it with

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2 In line with what we stated in the previous section, we adopt Han's (2013) concept of transparency, for whom transparency is associated with the idea of constant and voluntary exposure that entails loss of privacy and individual freedom.

3 Although the current name of the social network is *X*, we will keep *Twitter* when the platform is named that way by authors eventually cited in this article.

censorship and silencing. However, the author (2020) warns that cancellation as a designation reserved for public figures is a last-minute appeal for justice.

In the second perspective, to which we align ourselves, there is a predominance of this idea of a persuasive tool for social justice. Bouvier (2020) focused on the positive role that *Twitter* can play in social justice campaigns denouncing racist practices. Norris (2021), in turn, addressed perceptions regarding cancellation on university campuses among progressive liberals and social conservatives. Finally, Ng (2020) deconstructed the idea of a culture of insurmountable digital evils and encouraged the analysis of longer interactions in digital media to strengthen traditionally marginalized groups. It is important to note that our advocacy does not involve legitimizing violent actions on the internet under any pretext, but rather reflecting that cancellation can signal repudiation of violent actions and the need for retraction. It also offers the cancelled person the opportunity to retract (and in some way, minimize the damage caused by him/her), and not only the initial discomfort. It is about using persuasive tools and in particular seeking repair/social justice.

We emphasize that cancel culture is characterized by the use of evaluation, commiseration, and criticism strategies towards the actions of the cancelled subject, aiming to make it transparent and draw attention to the dissatisfaction of the interlocutors with that subject (Baym, 2000). Due to having more open usage policies than *Facebook* and *Instagram*, *Twitter* provides more space for interlocutors to assess and criticize the actions of subjects (and even assess and criticize the subjects themselves), as noted by Romano (2020). Common resources in social networks include using hashtags, tagging other people (network members or famous users), and making cancellation episodes visible (Romano, 2020). In the linguistic-discursive scope, we understand that motivations for cancellation mobilize strategies that result in confrontation, such as ridiculing, using inappropriate identity markers, or even insulting the person (Culpeper, 1996). Such strategies are intended to attack the other and, at the same time, cooperate with other members of the network who are engaged in that online-mediated interaction. Expanding on what was discussed in the previous section, we will review the three waves of (im)politeness studies, focusing on the interrelationship that the second and third waves maintain with the notions of metapragmatics and linguistic-discursive proxemics.

In the set of studies affiliated with the first wave[4], we will focus on the contributions of Brown & Levinson (1987) and Culpeper (1996). In adherence to the concept of face (Goffman, 1967), Brown & Levinson (1987) proposed five macro-strategies of politeness: (1) do the face threatening act (FTA) on record without redressive action, baldly (an action that would not require a repairing strategy – for example, asking for help, which would dispense with the use of politeness strategies); do the FTA on record with redressive action (2) positive politeness and (3) negative politeness; (4) do the FTA off record and (5) don't do the FTA. In turn, Culpeper (1996) dedicated himself to the study of impoliteness, conceiving it as the social disruption resulting from an attack on the interlocutors' faces, anticipating the macro-strategies of (1) bald on record impoliteness; (2) positive impoliteness; (3) negative impoliteness; (4) sarcasm or mock politeness and (5) withhold politeness, in allusion to the study of Brown & Levinson (1987).

In the set of studies affiliated with the second wave, the idea is defended that it is theoretically impossible to divorce social expectations from linguistic (im)politeness (Bousfield, 2008). In addition to this rescue of social aspects, the emergence of these studies stems from some criticisms of first-wave studies, such as the use of decontextualized and universalistic examples (Eelen, 2001; Grainger, 2011); the exclusive focus on the researcher's findings, as well as the silencing of the layperson's perspective (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2009; Grainger, 2011); and the restrictive notion of context, reduced to a set of social variables that do not encompass the complexity of interactive events (Eelen, 2001; Culpeper, 2011). The boundaries between politeness and impoliteness become increasingly blurry from the first to the second wave, as we move from a more universal instance (polite acts *versus* impolite acts) to a more evaluative instance (a contextually situated one). In this assessment, it is crucial to consider the context, which includes the interactional activity itself; power relations; shared world knowledge; previous offensive actions; the actions of interactants in the face (face threatening acts); submission to the opponent; the intervention of a dominant third party; commitment in negotiating a concession; and the withdrawal from conflicting communicative activity (Bousfield, 2008). Furthermore, it is conceived that

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4 Although Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983) have brought undeniable contributions to first-wave (im)politeness studies, we assume that the work of Brown & Levinson (1987) is central to this debate. Lakoff (1973) suggests there are three politeness rules: don't impose, give options, and make them feel good – be friendly. In turn, Leech (1983) postulates six politeness maxims (tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy), through which it is recommended to maximize one's own costs and the others' benefits; as well as to minimize one's own benefits and the others' costs.

(im)politeness is more instantiated in sociodiscursive dispute (Watts, 2009; Culpeper, 2011) than in social (in)adequacy (Haugh; Culpeper, 2018).

In this evaluative scope inherent to second-wave studies, we introduce the notion of metapragmatics in interface with the (im)politeness theory, emphasizing the idea that even in a first-wave approach (but with a second-wave – and perhaps third-wave – perspective), any linguistic configuration is potentially indexical (Silverstein, 1979). In this sense, we conceive that (im)politeness strategies would be indexical, encompassing linguistic, sociodiscursive, and sociointeractional dimensions, given that subjects negotiate (based on identity and ideology) the indices of (im)politeness, which would be co(n)textually situated in the interaction. It is through such metapragmatics that social actors/actresses presuppose, reflect, create, and shape a significant part of social reality (Silverstein, 1979); and rationalize, reference, and predicate language itself (Pinto, 2019). From this perspective, interactants presuppose, reflect, create, and shape what it means to be (im)polite in a specific context; as well as rationalize/reflect the use of (im)politeness strategies that mobilize silencing metapragmatics in the cancellation of public figures.

In the set of studies affiliated with the third wave, critiques are directed towards second-wave studies, particularly concerning the excessive focus on the emic perspective (and the neglect of the etic perspective) and the disregard for linguistic tools in favor of a greater emphasis on interpretation and context (Terkourafi, 2005; Haugh, 2007b; Grainger, 2011; Leech, 2014; Blitvich; Sifianou, 2019). In addition to integrating linguistic and discursive instances, these studies introduce an approach whose *locus* is interaction (Haugh; Culpeper, 2018), relying on the following epistemic assumptions: (im)politeness norms should be interpreted based on empirical data (Terkourafi, 2005; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2009); guided by a notion of relational and interactional face (Arundale, 2006); and derived from an implicature of (im)politeness negotiated in interaction, based on interlocutive expectations (Haugh, 2007b). Therefore, it is conceived that (im)politeness is not instantiated neither in linguistic usage nor in social norms but in social practices (Kádár; Haugh, 2013), so that we can analyze the interaction in a holistic/integrative way (Grainger, 2011; Haugh; Culpeper, 2018).

In this integrative/holistic/interactional sphere, inherent to third-wave studies, we propose the interface between the (im)politeness theory and the notion of linguistic-discursive proxemics, as interaction itself demands regulating interlocutive distances to construct more/less violent meanings. The concept of linguistic-discursive proxemics (Albuquerque; Muniz, 2022) stems from the notions of proxemics (Hall, 1968) and verbal proxemics (Carreira, 1997). The first arises in analogy to how animals establish territorial boundaries, which concerns to subjects' perception regarding the space management in the interpersonal relations (Hall, 1968). From the transposition from spatial (proxemics) to non-spatial (verbal proxemics), the latter emerges from the conception that territorial issues could be expressed in statements. By encapsulating the (non)verbal and the co(n)textual dimensions (Albuquerque; Muniz, 2022), we conceive that linguistic-discursive proxemics relates to the use of (de)valuation and territorial (dis)respect strategies – positive and negative (im)politeness (first wave); to the evaluation of interactants – who speaks, how he/she speaks, and for what purpose he/she speaks (second wave); and to the expectations of the discursive genre regarding the meanings to be constructed during the interaction, integrating strategic linguistic-discursive usage and interpersonal evaluations (third wave).

In summary, we presented an expository-argumentative design that encompassed at least two perspectives. By engaging in our online sociocultural practices, we position ourselves ideologically and intersubjectively in a hyper-visible world, which intensifies actions stemming from the *cancel culture*. This culture anticipates impolite language actions that traverse the three waves of (im)politeness studies: at the micro level, under the label of impoliteness strategies, especially positive (devaluing), which can however impact the negative face (territorial invasion) in some way; at the macro level, under the projection of subjects who assess their actions and establish metapragmatics – of cancellation – that silence, as a result; and at the meso level, under the convergence of usage and evaluation in instances of interaction, which regulate interlocutive distances that reinforce such metapragmatics to some extent, through (non)verbal and co(n)textual actions.

3 (N)ETNOGRAPHY AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN THE FIELD: THE (PER)COURSE OF RESEARCH

To carry out any research, it is necessary to choose more suitable paths to achieve the proposed objective. Undoubtedly, these paths are associated with the choice of research approach(es) and method(s). We align ourselves with an exclusively qualitative **approach**, aiming to provide "[...] a dense sharing with people, facts, and places that constitute the objects of research, to extract from this interaction the visible and latent meanings that are only perceptible to a sensitive attention [...]" (Chizzotti, 2003, p. 221). Therefore, our intention is to conduct a research that is "[...] characteristically exploratory, fluid, and flexible, data-oriented, and context-sensitive" (Mason, 2002, p. 24). Among the possibilities of qualitative research (Flick, 2009), we combine (N)etnography and Critical Discourse Analysis as **methods**, due to our interest in observing and recording the use of (im)politeness strategies in interactions on *X* (formerly *Twitter*) and in conducting a critical analysis instantiated in the discursive-textual scope.

We justify our choice for (N)etnography – precisely marked this way – due to the intrinsic epistemic relationship between Netnography and Ethnography[5], as the former constitutes "[...] a specialized form of ethnography adapted to the unique computer-mediated contingencies of today's social worlds" (Kozinets, 2014, p. 9-10). This interconnection inspires us to transpose two ethnographic frameworks to (N)etnography – the ethnographic incursion[6] (Green; Bloome, 1997) and the degree of involvement[7] (Spradley, 1980). Additionally, we aim to ratify them with the type of netnographic participation[8] (Kozinets, 2006) adopted. Thus, we choose the ethnographic perspective (Green; Bloome, 1997) and the low degree of involvement (Spradley, 1980) resulting from observational netnography (Kozinets, 2006), considering our interest in recording the functioning of (im)politeness strategies in online-mediated interactions without making any interventions in the expression of internet users.

Therefore, we aim to conduct a completely non-obtrusive and observational netnographic analysis (Kozinets, 2006), with data generation that considers the participants in the interaction and analyzes the engagement of each of them in conversations in a holistic way. Although assessing the participants may enhance data analysis, we will focus – in the study of (im)politeness strategies in interactions on *X* that would suggest the cancellation of Thaila Ayala – on the ethical principle. The main interest of this research is to analyze cues of linguistic-discursive violence in a public digital social network, where interpretability should be weighed by all of us.

By framing the research within the Critical Discourse Analysis method, we believe it is pertinent to consider the three-dimensional conception of discourse – *social practice*, *discursive practice*, and *text* – which combine the macrosociological, microsociological, and textual traditions of analysis (Fairclough, 2001). In terms of categories, text encompasses *vocabulary*, *grammar*, *cohesion*, and *textual structure*, while discursive practice (focused on text production, distribution, and consumption) includes the *force of statements*, *coherence*, and *intertextuality*. In turn, social practice reveals complex routines within the collective, when we consider that "[...] it is the nature of the social practice that determines the macro-processes of discursive practice, and it is the micro-processes that shape the text" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 115).

In our research, we conceive from the three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 2001) that the desire to interact on social networks (**social practice**) can inscribe us within the discursive genre *comments on X*, which involves a set of **discursive practices**. Among such discursive practices, we emphasize the need for internet users to negotiate (im)politeness strategies based on the use of these strategies in a specific **text** (comment). Therefore, the textual choices of the interactants, oriented by their identity and ideology, serve the discursive practices demanded by the genre, which integrates the large set of social practices belonging to this digital universe. In summary, commenting (on *X*) interconnects with discursive practices (deciding between politeness and impoliteness) and social practices (interacting on social networks).

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5 According to Silverman (2001), ethnography is the branch of anthropology responsible for observing and recording the actions of a particular people in society.

6 Green & Bloome (1997) envision three possibilities: doing ethnography, adopting an ethnographic perspective, and using ethnographic tools – from most to least immersive approach.

7 Spradley (1980) assesses that ethnographic research can have the following degrees of involvement: (i) high, with complete participation (acting as an ethnographer); (ii) low, with active participation (acting as a participant), moderate participation (balancing participation and observation), and passive participation (restricted to observation); and (iii) no involvement (no participation).

8 From the spectrum of different types of netnography, Kozinets (2006) proposed three forays: observational netnography, participant-observational netnography, and autoethnography – from least to most involvement.

In line with the context of *X* and in line with netnographic-discursive guidelines, we adopted the following research actions: (i) establish inclusion and exclusion criteria in line with the objective of this research; (ii) start recording field notes; (iii) pre-select posts on media and entertainment portals that mentioned *cancelled artists*, adopting a time frame between 2020-2021 (pandemic as a period of public health emergency); (iv) choose the cancelled artist (Thaila Ayala) based on the criterion of *cancellation resulting from an action related to the impacts of Covid-19*; (v) gather various documents related to the chosen artist (reports, blog entries, other posts) to assist in the analysis; (vi) select public conversations containing the keywords *cancelada(h), cancelamento, cancelar*, and/or mentioning Thaila Ayala on *X*; (vii) capture the selected interactions in their entirety; (viii) interrupt data generation based on saturation criterion[9]; (ix) generate a Portable Document Format (PDF) with the interactions to be analyzed; and (x) analyze the linguistic-discursive resources available in the interactions recorded in the PDF.

4 THAILA AYALA AND FOLLOWERS: IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES IN THE CANCELLATION OF THE ARTIST

The following data represents an episode of interaction that occurred on *X* (formerly *Twitter*) during the first half of June 2020. Due to the fact that, in online-mediated interactions, multiple interactants direct language actions towards multiple interactants (Thompson, 2018) – with the caveat that, in the case of public figures, the qualifier *multiple* can still expand –, we selected, based on the saturation criterion, (i) a post from G1 in which Thaila Ayala announced on her social media the launch of the *Vir.Us* clothing brand, referring to the *Love virus*; and (ii) seven comments divided into two thematic blocks that encompassed the idea of cancellation and the use of impoliteness strategies that reduced interlocutory distance and constructed metapragmatics of non-belonging, judgment, and silencing in the pursuit of social justice.

We will systematize the analysis into three blocks. The first one involves the news portal G1, which had posted an article on its website about the topic (G1, 2020) and reposted the link to the article on its profile on *X*. The other two include comments published in reaction to G1's news, divided into the following themes: cancellation itself (second block) and conjectures surrounding a marketing strategy (third block).

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9 Conceived as a common data generation process in qualitative research, saturation is established based on sample cohesion, theoretical-analytical cohesion, the absence of new cases, richness, and completeness (derived not from frequency but from detailed description), as Morse (1995) points out.

Figure 1: Post from the G1 news portal
Source: *Twitter* (2020)

Translation of verbal content: Thaila Ayala is criticized after launching a clothing brand; the company was named ″Vir.us″ amid a pandemic glo.bo/2MCmaai #G1

In the headline under analysis, we found three language resources that likely contributed to favorable comments regarding the artist's cancellation. The first of them is the use of passive voice in *Thaila Ayala é criticada após lançamento de marca de roupas* [*Thaila Ayala is criticized after launching a clothing brand*]. Using this resource, as Castilho (2012) asserts, we focus on the results of actions and mitigate the agents responsible for the criticism, in this case, the users of social networks and the media. By mitigating these agents, we reinforce the responsibility of the person who was the target of criticism (the artist) and the public non-acceptance of her action (creating the brand). In the second instance, we noticed a certain mitigating regarding public accountability directed at the artist in *a empresa recebeu o nome de ″Vir.us″* [*the company was named ″Vir.us″*], as it omits Thaila's agency in the baptism of the brand, at least in the co-text. The third of them is the expression *em meio a uma pandemia* [*amid a pandemic*], which emphasized the socio-historical context in which the brand was created. Beyond the shocking statistics at the time of 36,602 deaths and 694,116 confirmed cases in Brazil[10], the expression signaled an undeniable disregard for the followers who suffered from the impacts of Covid-19, which included both emotional and financial losses. Paradoxically, the non-verbal text reinforced a moment of joy and celebration, as seen in the facial expressions of people represented there (including the brand's creator: Thaila Ayala), at a time when the country was suffering irreversible consequences. In summary, we evaluate that the reference to the ideia of a virus should not appear in any way in celebration contexts.

Therefore, the post showed signs of a face threatening act to Thaila Ayala's face due to the use of (in)directive impoliteness strategies (linguistic dimension) in devaluing her actions. The hyper-visibility of the artist's actions and the undeniably critical content of the post could contribute to the future emergence of metapragmatics – on the part of the portal's readers – involving silencing, disapproval, and cancellation of the artist (sociodiscursive dimension). In turn, this could lead to the construction of meanings in

10 Data available at: http://g1.globo.com/bemestar/coronavirus/noticia/2020/06/08/casos-de-coronavirus-e-numero-de-mortes-no-brasil-em-8-de-junho.ghtml. Accessed on: 16 Oct. 2021.

subsequent online interactions that would reduce the interpersonal distance, aiming to attack the social image of the artist and promote social justice on behalf of all those who were somehow affected by the consequences of the pandemic (sociointeractional dimension). We believe that such a hypothetical scenario is in line with the immediate reaction of internet users on the artist's profiles. After being the target of criticism and attacks, the artist deleted the posts referring to the initial announcement and renamed the brand as *Amar.ca* (a wordplay with the Portuguese words "love" and "brand") in the same week. This action is congruent with the idea of cancellation as a persuasive tool that seeks social justice, in some way. The following comments are reactions to this G1 post since we were unable to access the artist's original posts.

C1

Em resposta a @g1
Cancela ela, a marcar , e todos da foto, esse povo pegou a noção e enfiou no c* só pode.
Mau gosto do caralho em plena pandemia, famílias perdendo vidas e esse tapa na cara da sociedade #noçaoZERO

C2

Em resposta a @g1
Cansada dessa geração lacração, povo não te mais noção da vida não.

1

C3

Em resposta a @g1
"vírus do amor"
Romantizar uma pandemia pra fazer marketing? É pra rasgar viu!
Enfiou a noção onde? Está tentando ganhar dinheiro com a dor dos outros.
Só no Brasil + de 37 MIL MORTOS vítimas da covid-19 😭😭😭😭😭😭😭

58

C4

Em resposta a @g1
Foi criticada porque foi uma imbecil, sem empatia e com zero noção do que ta acontecendo no Brasil e no mundo

1

Figure 2: 1st set of comments: cancellation itself

Source: *Twitter* (2020)

Translation of C1: In response to @g1 – Cancel her, the brand, and everyone in the photo, these people took the notion and shoved it up their a** for sure. Fucking terrible taste in the middle of a pandemic, families losing lives, and this slap in the face of society #ZEROsense

Translation of C2: In response to @g1 – Tired of this yas slay generation, people have no sense of life anymore.

Translation of C3: In response to @g1 – "Love virus" Romanticizing a pandemic for marketing? It's to tear up, you know! Where did you put your sense? Trying to make money from other people's pain. + 37 THOUSAND people have died from covid-19 in Brazil alone.

Translation of C4: In response to @g1 – She was criticized because she was foolish, lacked empathy, and zero awareness of what is happening in Brazil and the world.

The first three comments presented linguistic-discursive marks of distancing from the artist and a negative evaluation of her conduct through a deprecatory approach: *ela* [*her*] (Thaila Ayala), *a marca* [*the brand*], *todos da foto* [*everyone in the photo*], *esse povo* [*these people*] (C1), *dessa geração lacração* [*of this yas slay generation*] (C2), and *é pra rasgar viu!* [*it's to tear up, you know!*] (C3). Such uses revealed the emission of aggressive value judgments – sometimes directed at Thaila, sometimes at the celebrity's action – enhanced by both hyper-visibility and the attributes of online-mediated interactions. We draw attention to the high number of likes (heart icon), expressions of concerns about the pandemic in crying emojis (C3), and the pejorative reference to the artist in the expressions *geração lacração* [*yas slay generation*] (C2) and (*esse povo*) [*(these) people*] (C1 and C2), which were often associated with attacks directed at people linked to progressive agendas.

In this sense, internet users made use of impoliteness strategies that transcended the negative/positive impoliteness dichotomy (Bousfield, 2008) given that the strategies had both a devaluing character (positive impoliteness) and a territorial character (negative impoliteness) due to the negative evaluation (directed at the artist, her actions, and the people who ideologically accompanied her) and the deprecatory approach. The insults would be associated with the devaluation of the celebrity's social image. Directly and indirectly associated with cancellation, the emerging metapragmatics would result, for some perspectives, in vigilantism, moral harassment (or cyberbullying), intolerance, and snooping (Laidlaw, 2017), as a witch-hunt culture prioritizing punishment (Tucker, 2018); and for others, in social justice (Bouvier, 2020), and strengthening traditionally marginalized groups (Ng, 2020).

In greater explicitness, C1 legitimized cancellation as a digital social practice by issuing an interpellation to cancel: *ela* [*her*] (Thaila Ayala), *a marca* [*the brand*], and *todos da foto* [*everyone in the photo*]. To do so, she used an imperative associated with the indicative (Scherre, 2007), which is hypothetically milder than the imperative with subjunctive features (Faraco, 1986). In turn, the latter tends to be more imposing and more impolite (Yule, 2003). In this comment, there was a search for an affiliative action (joining the cancellation proposal, as it is a combative action against a collective evil) and an invasive action (interpellation of internet users to adhere to such proposal). Beyond this verbal mode, *cancel*, in clear association with cancel culture, provided the construction of metapragmatics directed at the personality and supporters (between violence and social justice) in the sociodiscursive and sociointeractional domains, as *cancel* involved disregarding such people and actions, with consequent impacts on the social image of those involved, at a minimum. This injunction was ratified by devaluing and pejorative terms that permeated the entire interaction (all four comments).

In this sense, the evaluations present in *enfiou a noção no c** [*shoved it up their a** for sure*], *mau gosto do caralho* [*fucking terrible taste*], *#noçãoZERO* [*#ZEROsense*] (C1), *povo não tem mais noção* [*people have no sense of life anymore*] (C2), "*vírus do amor*" ["*Love virus*"], *enfiou a noção onde?* [*where did you put your sense?*], *ganhar dinheiro com a dor dos outros* [*trying to make money from other people's pain*] (C3), and *foi criticada porque, imbecil, sem empatia e zero noção* [*she was criticized because she was foolish, lacked empathy, and zero awareness*] (C4) denoted the mobilization of positive impoliteness strategies aiming to offend the artist's face. She seemed to be alienated or insensitive to the pandemic statistics in Brazil and the social chaos that was unfolding at the time, so the risks to her face would become more intense as hyper-visibility and the interactional status would make her social image more vulnerable. In the listed evaluations, we highlight (i) the recurrence of the terms *noção* [*notion/sense*] and *enfiar* [*shove it up/put*], which carried a strong injunction (not having a *notion/sense* meant being alienated, and *shove it up/put* would potentially introduce pejorative expressions); (ii) the emphasis on the hashtag, which indicated total alienation (*noção zero* [*zero sense*]) and would allow internet users registered in other interactions to access this interaction through this hyperlink[11]; (iii) the use of quotation marks in *vírus do amor* [*Love virus*] to mark irony, which denounced a completely inhumane action in the pandemic scenario; (iv) the adjectival processes *mau gosto do caralho* [*fucking terrible taste*], *imbecil* [*foolish*], and *sem empatia* [*lacked empathy*], which directly affected the artist's social image; and (v) the expression *foi criticada porque* [*she was criticized because*], which justified the reason she was criticized after the clothing brand launch.

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11 The discussion of the hashtag's function by Zappavigna (2015) adds that it can label content, indicate evaluative stances, and organize the text (marking the metadiscourse using the # symbol). The author (2015) emphasizes that a hashtag relies on the existence of previous texts containing the same tag, allowing interlocutors to ignore, contest, or align themselves with the constructed values. For this reason, we believe that the hyperlink feature would expand the network of interlocutors involved and could intensify negative effects on the cancelled person's social image.

In the interaction instances, all these evaluations cooperated to establish a cascade reaction in favor not only of metapragmatics combating linguistic-discursive violence directed at the general public but mainly of cancellation metapragmatics, invading the artist's territoriality in the (non)verbal plane, with the aim of promoting an attempt at social repair. We assert that such attacks regulated interlocutive distance (interlocutive reducing to devalue, cancel, and promote social justice); marked metapragmatics of non-belonging, silencing, and judgment; employed positive (devaluing) and negative (imposing) impoliteness strategies; and, ultimately, legitimized cancellation. As it is an online-mediated interaction, we assume that these effects were amplified, especially due to the use of the hashtag and the strong tendency for virality (both because of the public figure and the context of the Covid-19 pandemic).

Beyond the action that generated the analyzed data, Thaila's positive face suffered multiple attacks. These attacks resulted in the artist's retraction in June 2020, in relation to the interactants mourned by Covid-19. The artist changed the commercial name of the clothing brand to *Amar.ca*, and in the statement that she acted *as lacking awareness* in an interview with Multishow/Play FM media channels (Programa Reclame, 2021) six months later (January 2021). We emphasize that all these actions contribute to viewing cancellation as a persuasive tool capable of prompting retractions like this to minimally mitigate the damage caused to those people.

C5

Em resposta a @g1
Marketing só não é mais burro porque não é possível.

♡ 6

C6

Em resposta a @g1
Um bom profissional de marketing custaria bem menos que o prejuízo que ela vai ter nessa idiotice.

♡ 2

C7

Em resposta a @g1
Gente, é tudo marketing e ninguém percebe?

Figure 3: 2nd set of comments: conjectures surrounding a marketing strategy
Source: *Twitter* (2020)

Translation of C5: In response to @g1 – Marketing is only not dumber because it's not possible.
Translation of C6: In response to @g1 – A good marketing professional would cost much less than the loss she will incur in this idiocy.
Translation of C7: In response to @g1 – Guys, it's all marketing, and no one realizes it?

This second set of comments brought conjectures made by internet users regarding the role of the artist's advertising team and the possible intentionality in renaming the brand in a short period as a commercial strategy. Despite the hypotheses (which would be associated with a strategy proposed by professionals), the interactants followed the same line of devaluation and cancellation. At that moment, all evaluations were directed towards marketing, as in the case of positive impoliteness strategies *marketing só não é mais burro* [*marketing is only not dumber*] (C5) and *um bom profissional de marketing custaria bem menos* [*a good marketing professional would cost much less*] (C6). In *idiotice* [*idiocy*] (C6) and *Gente, é tudo marketing e ninguém percebe?* [*Guys, it's all*

marketing, and no one realizes it?] (C7), there was also no direct allusion to the artist, although we know from the context that the criticisms were directed at the marketing team, herself (the supposed actions of the marketing team impacted Thaila's social image), and the internet users who did not perceive the artist's intentionality.

From the analyzed interaction, we argue that it is possible to question whether this cancellation actually was a form of reverse marketing, where the person responsible for a brand is attacked and high levels of engagement on social networks are generated. These high levels of engagement help more people see products linked to the brand than in conventional campaigns (Karsaklian, 2004). In the first half of 2021, we note that *Amar.ca*'s official profile had around 50 thousand followers and was engaged in partnerships with several brands in Rio de Janeiro.

Finally, we assume that the positive impoliteness strategies conveyed by the co-text would reveal a certain mitigation to the artist's social image. In a linguistic-discursive and sociointeractional spheres, however, the context made clear that metapragmatics emerged that devalued these subjects (marketing team, artist, and some internet users) and invalidated Thaila Ayala's apology. As a marketing strategy, such apology would be insincere. Moreover, the retraction itself could generate greater engagement for the artist, functioning as an (unethical) marketing strategy. From this perspective, we emphasize that such accusations would increase the cancellation, as – by speculating that the creation of the brand (which would already justify this movement) could have been strategically designed to generate engagement – the artist's actions and the marketing team would transcend a mere lapse and reach boundless perversity.

5 FINAL REMARKS

In this research, we assume that the negotiations of meaning emerging from interactions on platform *X* were marked by linguistic-discursive violence, justified by the dynamics of interactions and the sociocultural context generated by the pandemic. Through (n)etnographic and critical-discursive procedures, we were able to identify different traces of this violence in the interaction under analysis. However, it is essential to highlight that linguistic-discursive violence arises from the language actions of the interactants, and primarily from the artist (and the supposed advertising team). In a co(n)textual analysis, it is worth emphasizing that the (violent) comments and the cancellation itself do not occur in a social vacuum but are reactions to much more latent forms of violence: the creation of the brand and its supposed purpose.

The use of violent linguistic-discursive strategies by the interactants – such as ironies, devaluing rhetorical questions, pejorative adjectives, insinuations, and distinct grammatical-textual uses – makes us understand cancellation as a sociocultural practice that has been gaining increasing prominence on digital social networks, especially *amid a pandemic*. As these strategies (linguistic dimension) emerge from a specific identity-ideological framework, inscribed in a specific sociocultural practice (sociodiscursive dimension), and form a unit of meaning through cascading violent comments (sociointeractional dimension) – we emphasize that this analysis is merely an analytical possibility. This implies that this analysis is guided by our perspective, which is permeated by (inter)subjectivities, despite being grounded in the co(n)text of enunciation.

Moreover, we reiterate that the internet users employed linguistic-discursive strategies that brought forth violent metapragmatics through the reduction of interlocutory distance but as a kind of counter-hegemonic turn. This means that the responsibility for constructing scenarios of linguistic-discursive violence should not be attributed to the internet users but primarily to Thaila Ayala's (and her team) actions. In other words, regardless of the actions of the vulnerable side, in a counter-hegemonic metadiscursive dispute, the artist's violence – a supposedly intentional creation of the brand – will never be overcome.

Amidst the high flow of online interactions, we hope to be able to use the interaction space we have on digital social networks with the awareness that cancellation, as a boycott, can be a reaction to a subject's language actions and his/her recent work (and not personal attack), as a way of minimally repairing social abysses. The fact that we have the means to make our voices heard should ideally function as a powerful persuasive tool, without losing sight of the need to become more careful regarding the language actions we intend to make public.

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