

A Techno-Discursive Analysis of Manifestations Surrounding Diego Maradona's Death: Methodologies for Delimiting Discursive Regions on Twitter / *Análise tecnodiscursiva de manifestações em torno de D. Maradona: metodologias de delimitação de regiões do dizer no Twitter*

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we propose strategies for capturing polemical regions in a *corpus* of posts from Twitter, setting out from a theoretical framework that emphasises a dialogic perspective. Based on these strategies, we provide entry points for analysing the materiality of the techno-discursive universe that circulates in digital environments. By producing this research *corpus*, we acquired a clearer understanding of elements that compose discursive images surrounding Diego Maradona in circulation on Twitter following the player's death. Towards this aim, we formulated and critically considered techniques for extracting and producing a digital research *corpus* by delimiting a discursive space on Twitter surrounding Maradona's death. The results obtained pertain to the conditions for use of these platforms by discourse analysts, the cartography of the regions configured in this space and the clashes that become consolidated within them.

KEYWORDS: Dialogism; Discourse; Twitter; Maradona; Digital platforms

RESUMO

Neste artigo, propomos estratégias de captação de regiões polêmicas em corpus produzido a partir de publicações do Twitter, partindo de quadro teórico que enfatiza a perspectiva dialógica. Com base nessas estratégias, fornecemos entradas para a análise da materialidade oriunda do universo tecnodiscursivo em circulação em ambientes digitais. Em razão da produção do corpus da investigação, avançamos na compreensão de traços que compõem imagens discursivas em torno de Diego Maradona em circulação no Twitter por ocasião de seu falecimento. Para tanto, explicitamos e problematizamos técnicas de captação e produção de um corpus digital de pesquisa, através da delimitação de um espaço discursivo no Twitter que circundou a morte de Maradona. Os resultados obtidos se dirigem tanto às condições de utilização dessas plataformas por analistas do discurso, quanto à cartografia das regiões do dizer que se configuram nesse espaço e dos embates que nelas ganham consistência.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dialogismo; Discurso; Twitter; Maradona; Plataformas digitais

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Opening Considerations

In conceiving this article, we set ourselves two main objectives: the first involved the proposal of strategies to capture polemical regions in a *corpus* formed by posts on Twitter using a dialogic approach, while the second, based on these strategies, involved providing entry points for an analysis of the materiality deriving from the techno-discursive universe in circulation in digital environments. Following the production of this investigative *corpus*, we formulated a third objective, which is aimed towards comprehending elements that composed discursive images surrounding Diego Maradona, in circulation on Twitter, at the time of his death.

Conceiving this article in terms of three distinct objectives effectively allowed us to emphasize something that strikes us as significant: the convergence between the dialogic perspective attributed to the Bakhtin Circle and the discourse analyses is based on a theoretical-philosophical gesture that demands explanation and constant problematization, with the aim of exploring its potentialities and openings. Put otherwise, the relationship constructed between the works produced by the Bakhtin Circle, which date from the 1920s to the 1970s, and the discursive perspectives founded from the 1970s is not organized in a continuous chronological sequence. There is no direct influence, therefore, or the constitution of a lineage as such. What there is, according to the records available to us today, are imposed challenges, questions posed at a certain intellectual conjuncture, in the face of which the Bakhtin Circle's thought becomes a powerful tool of theoretical intervention and creation. Thus, the rejection of any such continuity inevitably draws us closer to the Foucauldian archaeological project, according to which discontinuity is not just another theme on the horizon of historians but a tool capable of instigating a problematic field: "on what basis, in fact, could [the historian] speak without this discontinuity that offers him history – and his own history – as an object?" (Foucault, 2002, p.10).¹

We begin by explaining the contribution of the Bakhtin Circle to the discursive perspective (Maingueneau, 2005), demonstrating its impact and productiveness. Next, we show the stages involved in constituting our analytic *corpus*, selecting the manifestations

¹ FOUCAULT, M. Introduction. In: FOUCAULT, M. *Archaeology of Power*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, pp.3-19.

surrounding the death of the Argentinian soccer player Diego Maradona as a significant event, which resulted in diverse heterogenic positionings, susceptible to a cartography of meanings (Deusdará & Rocha, 2021). In this way, the techniques employed are presented and explained so as to facilitate their use by other researchers in the field of discourse analysis, as well as to problematize the limitations observed, a question to which discursive research can make a decisive contribution.

1 The Bakhtin Circle and the Discursive Perspective: Convocations from the Digital Environment

In this section, we explore the potential points of articulation between the contributions of the Bakhtin Circle and the discursive perspective adopted here with the aim of proposing research strategies in the digital environment. As we wish to demonstrate, these points of articulation have an impact on the methodologies for producing a *corpus* in a digital environment and on the use of existing programming tools for such analyses. In fact, the etymology of the word ‘convoke’ already suggests the act of sharing – a ‘calling together.’ Convocations are invitations to assemblies, meetings and encounters configured as spaces where words circulate and whose interactive outcomes cannot be fully foreseen. Considering the emergence of the digital environment as a device that convokes us to think emphasizes precisely this dimension of the non-foreseeable – if we accept the premise that the meaning of a word is indissociable from the contexts in which it circulates: that is, its meaning neither contains nor is fundamentally guided by any intentionality. In the terms posed by the Bakhtin Circle: “Every ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow, of reality, but is also itself a material segment of that very reality” (Vološinov, 1986, p.11).² This formulation, which situates signs as part of material life, is made explicit in the clash with idealist and psychologist approaches: “Idealism and psychologism alike overlook the fact that understanding itself can come about only within some kind of semiotic material (e.g., inner speech), that sign bears upon sign, that consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs” (Vološinov, 1986, p.11).³

² VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1986.

³ For reference, see footnote 2.

An important clue concerning the relationship between meaning and the circulation of words is formulated as follows: “All these forms of speech interchange operate in extremely close connection with the conditions of the social situation in which they occur and exhibit an extraordinary sensitivity to all fluctuations in the social atmosphere” (Vološinov, 1986, p.20).⁴ In this formulation, the word is not only apprehended in terms of its connection with the concrete situation: the idea is that the word is permeable to alterations within the spaces in which it circulates. Here we underline the relevance of this clue for the problematization of the forms in which words circulate in the digital environment.

More radically, the author states:

Social psychology in fact is not located anywhere within (in the ‘souls’ of communicating subjects) but entirely and completely without – in the word, the gesture, the act. There is nothing left unexpressed in it, nothing ‘inner’ about it – it is wholly on the outside, wholly brought out in exchanges, wholly taken up in material, above all in the material of the word (Vološinov, 1986, p.19).⁵

The rejection of the presence of the interiority of the word, formulated radically in the above excerpt when the author indicates that “[the materiality of the word] is wholly on the outside,” is a premise that suspends the classical model of communication, which supposes that the speaker first has something to say and only subsequently chooses the way of placing this content in circulation. This classical model, identified with the formulations of Roman Jakobson, is strongly based on content and loses sight of the way in which the medium is itself a constitutive part of the textuality placed in circulation. Rather than thinking of communication as a vehicle, the transmission of consciousness or the transportation of meaning, Vološinov conceives the word as practical consciousness, an active creation of meanings, evidence of a continuous social process, as the English theorist Raymond Williams (1977, p.37) emphasized in his pioneering study on the author.

If we confer special attention to these theoretical indications, this is because of the importance we attach to them in exploring forms of enunciation in the digital environment, in particular those found on social media platforms. In fact, we wish, in

⁴ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁵ For reference, see footnote 2.

preliminary fashion, to emphasize a difficulty: the intense circulation of verbal and non-verbal texts on social media poses a significant impasse to theories that indissociably bind meaning to its contexts of circulation, as argued here. Put otherwise, we consider that the investigation of social network posts is especially challenging for discourse analysts. Given the opaque nature of algorithmic structures and the lack of openness concerning the data that the companies owning these platforms possess, the availability of these posts seems fortuitous, ephemeral, something accessed and then lost at incredible speed. In this context, there is an apparent loss of materiality and all that is retained is a kind of ‘content.’ One effect provoked by this fleetingness of social media texts is the possibility of apprehending less the materiality and more its ‘content,’ the idea that someone has said something without knowing exactly how or why. At first glance, these effects would seem to reinforce theories that emphasize the primacy of modes of enunciation over the fragments of utterances. Aiming to problematize these practices, we ask the following: do words then overlap with the alliance between ways of saying and media of circulation? This impression collides head on with the perspective according to which “it is wholly on the outside, wholly brought out in exchanges, wholly taken up in material, above all in the material of the word,” as claimed in the earlier citation. Hence, our project is not directed towards excavating the frequency and co-occurrence of words in digital enunciations – topics central to the content-based perspective. Rather, through words, we seek to observe the constitution of forms of enunciation in a digital environment. In pursuing this approach, the discussion of Barbosa and Di Fanti (2016) provides an important signpost when they suggest that “in this setting in which discourse is formed and transformed through the constitutive relation with other discourses, the speaker becomes both responsive and responsible for what he or she says” (Barbosa & Di Fanti 2016, p.5).⁶ Thus we consider it essential to move beyond this content-based ‘feeling’ and create investigative strategies that restore the local conflicts and the clashes in certain regions of discourse on the platforms in question.

Although formulations were not directed specifically towards the field of discourse studies, the thought of the Bakhtin Circle decisively influenced renewals in this field of studies, especially from the 1980s, as Gregolin (2004) stresses. According to the

⁶ In Portuguese: “nesse cenário, em que o discurso se forma e se transforma a partir da constitutiva relação com outros discursos, o locutor se instaura responsivo e responsável pelo seu dizer.”

latter author, the recourse to Bakhtinian reflection is particularly significant with the arrival on the scene of the problematic of enunciation as an alternative path to the mainstream tendencies in the field. The circulation of notions like dialogism, initially mediated by the works of Tzvetan Todorov and Jacqueline Authier-Revuz, marked significant alterations in the field.

One indication in this respect concerns the use that Maingueneau (2005) makes of the notion in *Genèses du discours*, originally published in 1983, in which Bakhtin's notions connect to Todorov and Authier-Revuz's in the sense of a decentring of the subject of the enunciation and the relationship with the Other as the foundation of discursivity (Maingueneau, 2005). This work interests us precisely because it presents a fragment of an intellectual landscape discussed by Gregolin (2004). On this point, it is Maingueneau himself who, in his preface to the Brazilian translation, encapsulates the setting in which the work emerged at the beginning of the 1980s: "textual analysis was dominated by semiotics, linguistics and generative grammar, and the French School of Discourse Analysis was in crisis, undermined by the reflux of Marxism and psychoanalysis" (Maingueneau, 2005, p.12).⁷

From this work, we highlight two basic aspects that provide methodological guidelines in order to deploy the dialogic principle, namely: i) the proposal to operationalize the primacy of interdiscursivity, and ii) the definition of the notion of the polemic in correlation with the dialogic level of the enunciation. Merely picking up on this mention of dialogism, in "The Problem of Speech Genres," Mikhail Bakhtin (1986)⁸ interrogates the primacy attributed to literary genres, arguing that in everyday uses of language utterances are also embedded in "relatively stable types." Expanding on this point, the author proposes taking everyday conversation as the prototypical scene for comprehending the dynamic of verbal exchanges. In this scenario, the meaning attributed to an utterance is a function of its relation to previous utterances. Generically speaking, the dialogic principle is characterized, among other aspects, by the relational premise of the enunciative meaning, which conceives the utterance as an 'link' in a chain with other utterances. In *Genèses du discours*, Maingueneau (1983) takes up this premise, via the

⁷ In Portuguese: "...a análise de textos era dominada pela semiótica, a linguística, pela gramática gerativa, e a Escola Francesa de Análise do Discurso estava em crise, minada pelo refluxo do marxismo e da psicanálise."

⁸ BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

debates fomented by Todorov and Authier-Revuz, as we can observe in the bibliographic references contained in the footnotes to his work.

Seeking to provide a methodological framework for the dialogic perspective, Maingueneau (1983) proposes configuring interdiscursivity as a problematic delimited by the triad of the *discursive universe* – “the set of discursive formations of all kinds that interact in a given conjuncture” (Maingueneau, 2005, p.35);⁹ the *discursive field* – “the set of discursive formations that compete with and mutually delimit each other within a determined region of the discursive universe” (Maingueneau, 2005, p.35);¹⁰ and *discursive spaces* – “subsets of discursive formations that the analyst deems relevant, for his aim, placing in relation” (Maingueneau, 2005, p.37).¹¹ This triad especially interests us due to the mention made of the researcher’s work in constituting discursive spaces of analysis. Considering interdiscursivity as a primacy of language production does not convoke us to recognize the impossibility of exploring, not without delimiting regions of apprehension of their more visible marks, or what Authier-Revuz (1990) called a “demonstrated heterogeneity.” Maingueneau’s proposal further develops the recognition that it is the researcher’s connection to the research object that enables the construction of a delimited area not of this or that discursive formation but of a region in which a regulated conflict becomes actualized. From this viewpoint, the identity of a discursive formation does not stem from its apparent interior but from the way in which “by delimiting the zone of what is legitimately sayable [a discursive formation], it thereby simultaneously attributes to the Other the zone of the interdicted, that is, what is unsayable” (Maingueneau, 2005, p.39).¹²

Along with the proposal relating to interdiscursivity, we are also interested in taking up the question of the delimitation of the notion of the polemic when the author distinguishes the dialogical – “the level of constitutive interaction” (Maingueneau, 2005, p.110)¹³ – from the polemical – which “is responsible for the ‘demonstrated’

⁹ In Portuguese: “conjunto de formações discursivas de todos os tipos que interagem numa conjuntura dada.”

¹⁰ In Portuguese: “conjunto de formações discursivas que se encontram em concorrência, delimitando-se reciprocamente em uma região determinada do universo discursivo.”

¹¹ In Portuguese: “subconjuntos de formações discursivas que o analista julga relevante para seu propósito colocar em relação.”

¹² In Portuguese: “ao delimitar a zona do dizível legítimo, [uma formação discursiva] atribuiria por isso mesmo ao Outro a zona do interdito, isto é, do dizível errado.”

¹³ In Portuguese: “o da interação constitutiva.”

heterogeneity, the citation, in the broadest sense” (MAINGUENEAU, 2005, p.112).¹⁴ Once again, a notion is formulated here that allows us to comprehend the relationship between saying and its other. In fact, the polemic “introduces the Other in its domain to better conjure its threat, but this Other only enters annulled as such, a simulacrum” (MAINGUENEAU, 2005, p, 113).¹⁵ Thus, what we see is the reflection around which the relationship between a discourse and its other does not occur directly but through the constitution of a simulacrum with which the polemic maintains a double bond: “by the fact that it itself is merely a simulacrum of war, as its name indicates, a paper war, and by the fact that it never ceases to translate the Other into its own simulacrum” (Maingueneau, 2005, p, 113).¹⁶

Consequently, we take two theoretical proposals that, in our view, make explicit the impact of the contributions of the Bakhtin Circle to discursive studies. In terms of the operationalization of the primacy of interdiscursivity, we highlight the delimitation of the discursive space by convoking the researcher to constitute a region of the discursive clashes to be apprehended as a fundamental strategy in the constitution of a field of analysis. This region supposes the highlighting of the researcher’s connections – a problematic denominated, in French institutional analysis, as the analysis of implications (Baremblytt, 1992)¹⁷ – which we consider to be a particularly productive reflection given the options that the investigator is convoked to assume in response to the quantity and diversity of the linguistic material generated on digital platforms.

The second entry point indicated – the definition of the notion of polemic – becomes a fertile tool as a result of the delimitation of the region in which the clashes become explicit. From this perspective, the polemic is not reduced to the argumentative dispute between two distinct positions but advances the investigation of the way in which an enunciative position is constituted not only by affirming itself but also by establishing another in relation to which it remains separate. The researcher is tasked with discovering investigative strategies that enable the apprehension of these forms of citing one discourse by another, constituting simulacra. One perception offered by our approach to the

¹⁴ In Portuguese: “se responsabiliza pela heterogeneidade ‘mostrada’, a citação, no sentido mais amplo.”

¹⁵ In Portuguese: “introduz o Outro em seu recinto para melhor conjurar sua ameaça, mas esse Outro só entra anulado enquanto tal, simulacro.”

¹⁶ In Portuguese: “pelo fato de que ela mesma é apenas um simulacro de guerra, como o indica seu nome, uma guerra de papel, e pelo fato de que ela não cessa de traduzir o Outro em seu próprio simulacro.”

¹⁷ For a comparison between the discursive and institutionalist perspectives, see Rocha & Deusdará (2010).

functioning of digital networks is that these procedures of saying the other under the appearance of the same configure a linguistic-discursive mechanism intensely reiterated in these forms of enunciation in digital environments.

Twitter in Critical Perspective: Techno-politics and Power Regimes. At this point, we consider it important to develop a critical perspective of Twitter as a platform, in which the techno-political dimensions and power regimes of this discursive field are emphasized. This approximation is, in our view, a necessary outcome of the fact that we assume the indissociability between the utterances and the platforms through which they circulate, as discussed previously. Techno-discursive analysis emphasizes the irreversibility between the discursive dimension and the technical, the linguistic and the extralinguistic, discourse and its use in digital contexts (Paveau, 2020). We propose to combine techno-discursive analysis with Platform Studies, strongly influenced by Science and Technology Studies, which underline the power regimes, practices and materialities that constitute scientific production and technological artifacts (D'Andrea, 2020, Van Dijck, 2020). By employing diverse methodologies within digital environments, Platform Studies aim to understand and stretch their logic, reflecting on the potentialities and limitations of collection, processing, and visualization through the APIs of the diverse platforms (D'Andrea, 2020). This is a perspective that envisages so-called social networks like Twitter not as neutral spaces within which subjects would be able to interact freely, or as facilitators of all voices, as the company likes to present itself (Van Dijck, 2013), but as networks determined by hierarchical structures and shaped by computational, material, economic and political aspects of online connectivity (Van Dijck, 2013). At the same time, this research avoids any technological determinism in order to think about how, amid complex and asymmetric power struggles, discursive spaces and techno-grammatical resources mutually constitute one another. The discursive formations and algorithmic structures co-construct each another, recognizing that the discursive practices transform digital space and are transformed by it (Paveau, 2020). The subjects of discursive formations are capable of developing uses, planned or otherwise, of the interfaces and their functionalities and materialities (or *affordances*), constituting discursive *devices* not necessarily limited by the possibilities offered by the developers (D'Andrea, 2020; Paveau, 2020).

One of the prevalent techniques in the digital humanities is ‘textual mining,’ a term that has been criticized for implying that there pre-exists a primary textual and informational material to be subsequently explored (D’Andrea, 2020). At the same time, the processing of the texts is usually undertaken by prefabricated tools in which the researcher activates a single line of code and cannot intervene in any significant decisions taken in relation to the *corpus*, necessary to reach conclusions and rationalize inconclusive arguments or productive failures (Callaway, 2020). By seeking to overcome the limits of the analysis from the individual viewpoint, therefore, the researcher runs the risk of generalization, of reification of the data and of an acritical use of the tools for processing and analysing large numbers of texts. How, then, can we articulate a large-scale perspective of discursive practices in a digital environment, as well as a critical regard of the field?

We utilized the Wolfram Mathematica software, which presents itself as “the world’s definitive system for modern technical computing” (<https://www.wolfram.com/mathematica>), since it is a computational system that covers the major areas of computing, including data science, neural networks and artificial intelligence. Given its all-encompassing claim to be a universal and omnipresent computational language, Wolfram can be criticized because it works with texts in a highly quantitative and, in some cases, nonspecific form. It possesses a geolinguistic hierarchy, as it gives priority to US English in the elaboration of all its linguistic and computational programming tools and consequently marginalizes other languages. However, this weakness can be turned into an advantage if suitably exploited by the researcher. Due to its uniqueness in terms of the possibility afforded to the researcher with an intermediate knowledge of computer programming languages, thanks to its ample documentation,¹⁸ it allows new functions to be created for processing text through the construction of programmatic infrastructures capable of operating with languages like Spanish, Portuguese and others. In this way, it allows the researcher a much higher level of choice and critical potentiality compared to other computational languages.

¹⁸ In relation to textual analysis, see <https://reference.wolfram.com/language/guide/TextAnalysis.html>.

2 Production of the Research *Corpus* Based on Dialogical Strategies for Recovering Debates

In this section we explain the analytic course taken, presenting the technological tools used in composing the research *corpus*. We also seek to define some of the investigative steps made possible by these tools, problematizing their uses through the discursive approach defined above.

At the same time, we also need to point out that the decision to survey linguistic-discursive material on Diego Maradona was based on a prior interest in the intersection between media and political discourses on the player's death, which included the formulation of a number of hypotheses. Although insufficient to present results that would confirm these hypotheses, the wordclouds produced allow certain debates to be recovered. The delimitation of a specific discursive region and the access to the constructed debates depends on mobilizing other procedures among the tools for capturing segments of the *corpus*, which emphasize some clashes over others.

We did not interrogate the material on 'what' is said about Maradona but, in the discourse on Maradona, asked which questions become relevant, which voices appear, which meanings emerge in debate, so that a new phase is made possible: the access to a local *corpus* that enables a discursive analysis. The paths suggested below demonstrate possible entry points for researchers interested in the investigation of discourses in a digital environment.

The references to Diego Maradona on Twitter were collected in partnership with Documenting the Now (<https://www.docnow.io/>), a consortium between the University of Maryland, Washington University and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to develop tools for the use, collection and ethical preservation of social media content. The project responds to the dramatic rise in the use of social media to document historically momentous events, as well as the use of Twitter in social activism to share information, intervene in debates and garner support (Kuo, 2016; Clark, 2015; Brock, 2012). In partnership with this team, 1,644,234 tweet identifiers were collected that mentioned the phrase < diego maradona > between 8-30 November 2020. The tweets were collected using twarc, a tool developed in Python language by the team of librarians from

Documenting the Now. This tool connects to the Twitter API and allows tweets to be collected.¹⁹

The survey was undertaken soon after the death of Diego Maradona, an Argentinean soccer player, considered one of the best players in the history of the sport, who died on 25 November 2020. In response, the Argentinian president Alberto Fernández declared three days of national mourning and the news reverberated around the world. The wake for the player was held at the *Casa Rosada*, the offices of the Argentinean president, with the honours of a state funeral. A huge crowd attended, interrupted by disturbances involving police intervention. This very brief account already provides clues for us to read the news reports, messages and diverse images that point, among other aspects, to an interaction between the discursive fields of politics and sports.

Hence, one of the questions guiding our research was: what is the legacy of a figure like Diego Maradona in digital culture? What tensions and contradictions within Latin American culture are present in the discursive space delimited around this figure? Our hypothesis is that the discursive analysis of this space is capable of revealing the dialogic and polemical character and the primacy of interdiscursivity in digital discourse. It foregrounds disputes over the social meanings embodied by the Latin American soccer idol, political and geopolitical debates, the challenges faced by the left and the commoditization of culture and specifically the world of sport in Latin America.

At the same time, adhering to ethical guidelines for best practices suggested in studies of social networks and specifically Twitter (Bergis, Summers & Mitchell, 2018; Clark, 2015), the research protected users' privacy, did not reveal the names or pseudonyms of individual accounts, and avoided identifying specific users. Additionally, entire tweets were not cited without prior permission.

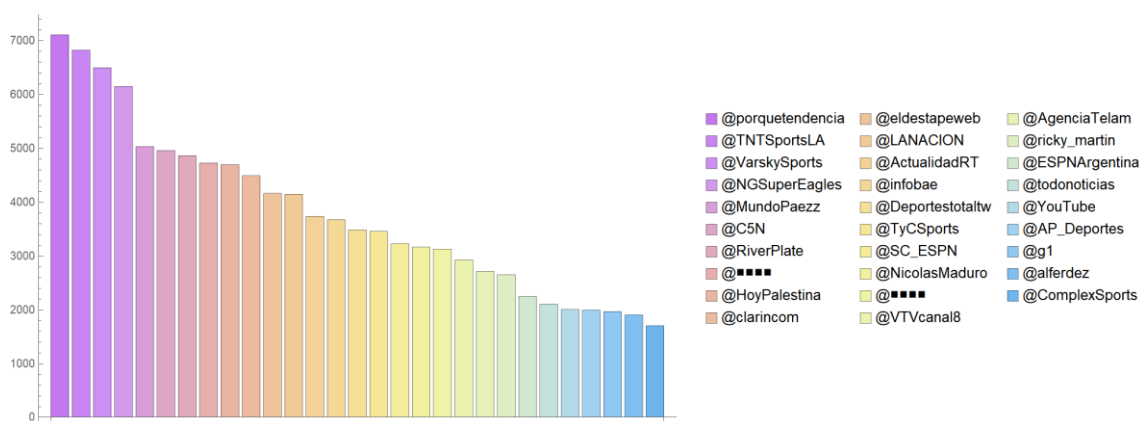
3 Clues for Capturing Polemical Regions on Twitter

The first step taken was to recognize the languages from our *corpus* of tweets mentioning Diego Maradona, using a function that clears the *corpus* of constructs like links and non-alphanumerical characters to facilitate language recognition. This process

¹⁹ The data is available at <https://archive.org/details/diego-maradona-tweets>. A brief presentation of the collection can be found at <https://catalog.docnow.io/datasets/20210102-diego-maradona/>.

this diversity of usernames indicated by the survey of occurrences of @ allows us to construct analytic hypotheses and define enunciative regions to which researchers can dedicate themselves in more detail. It illustrates the uninterrupted and multiple dialogue between different voices, spheres of social life and themes present in the tweets on Maradona, including sports journalism, the show business world, sports, the culture industry, music and politics. Such diversity reinforces our hypothesis of an intense interaction between the discursive fields of politics and sports, making it necessary to advance in the delimitation of certain discursive regions so as to be able to apprehend the forms in which this type of interaction/clash is actualized.

Table 2 – Most frequent usernames in Spanish



Source: THE AUTHORS AND WOLFRAM MATHEMATICA

In Spanish, meanwhile, the names of the most mentioned users include the accounts of sports news outlets, the leading Argentinian newspapers and journalists, as well as TV channels and programs on sports, pertaining to both mainstream media and alternative journalism from different countries and from Latin America as a whole. There are also the accounts of various soccer teams important in Maradona’s career, official Argentinean institutions, and personalities from the Latin American show business and music.

A prominent example that allows us to dispel any expectation of univocity in the texts can be observed in the fact that the account of the Argentinean president, Alberto Fernandes, was one of the most cited users, with 1,901 mentions. A preliminary analysis of the tweets that cite Fernandes shows that many of them criticize the president, suggesting that he was exploiting the player and his death for political purposes. This type

of observation constitutes compelling evidence that the mere occurrence of an account does not allow inferences to be made on the discursive positions being constructed.

Many tweets with the hashtag *#VerguenzaNacional* (*#NationalShame*) accuse Alberto Fernández of using Maradona's death for political ends: "Not even with Diego Maradona dead do they stop using him politically. Terrible political leadership *#NationalShame*."²⁰ Others express dissatisfaction with the way in which the wake was planned, which caused tumults and police repression, after which the police prevented the entry of thousands of fans: "The useless Albertito and Cristina Kirchner RUINED the wake of Diego Maradona."²¹ These discursive modes indicate a polarization that expressed antagonistic political forces during the event.

There are also those who made use of the events at the wake to criticize health policy: "The death of Diego Maradona is more important to the president than the crisis we're experiencing in Argentina, he is more concerned about the show of the wake while he himself bans us from leaving isolation to mourn our own because of Covid, which only exists when it suits him."²² However, this polarization is not constituted solely in two visible forms: for and against the government. In the last tweet, the tension centres around the clash between the production of a media event and the health restrictions during the pandemic. These aspects point to the need to assume the techniques for capturing discursive utterances as a means to produce a research *corpus*, delimiting regions of discourse that permit an exploration of the way in which clashes are configured and become consolidated.

There are also numerous tweets that are purely supportive of Maradona, referencing writers and other cultural figures from the Latin American left who have written about him. In the example, one feature of the discursive space delimited around Maradona stands out: his polemical dimension, linked to Argentinean politics. This feature, however, is not constituted without a debate that emerges on the frontier between sport, the show business industry and politics.

²⁰ In Spanish: "Ni muerto Diego Maradona dejan de usarlo políticamente. Que terrible la dirigencia política *#VerguenzaNacional*."

²¹ In Spanish: "Los inútiles de Albertito y Cristina Kirchner ARRUIÑARON el velorio de Diego Maradona."

²² In Spanish: "Para el presidente la muerte de Diego Maradona es más importante q la crisis q estamos viviendo en Argentina, se preocupa más x el show del velatorio cuando él mismo nos prohíbe salir a velar a los nuestros x el covid q existe sólo cuando a él le conviene."

Some tweets celebrate the fact that Diego Maradona's daughters and former wife did not greet the vice-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner at the wake: "Dalma and Gianinna refused to embrace Cristina Kirchner at Diego Maradona's wake. #NationalShame."²³ Hashtags like #NationalShame emphasize the criticism and the anti-Peronist discourse.

Another significant account mentioned in this space is that of the Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, who is mentioned 3,161 times, highlighting Maradona's importance in the politics and geopolitics of Latin American culture. These tweets are primarily supportive, proclaiming Maradona's collaboration with the Venezuelan regime and the Cuban regime. In this sense, Maradona appears as an important figure for the Latin American and Latin Americanist left, although he also appears as a target of criticisms of present-day leftist governments.

Thus, while some tweets consider him an emblem of the Latin American left – "His disobedience was to oppose the blockade against Cuba, support the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, play soccer with Evo and support peace in Colombia, always when other voices were lukewarm"²⁴ – others downplay his more political side: "Diego Maradona would also live this taste for the people off the field. But his trips to visit Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez would leave the bitter aftertaste of defeat. It is undoubtedly on the field that Maradona caused a revolution."²⁵ The polemic in this delimited discursive space emerges between those who celebrate the player as a revolutionary hero, an ally of the underprivileged, and those who limit his legacy to sport and criticize his more political side, when associated with left-wing Latin American leaders like Fidel Castro, Evo Morales, Hugo Chávez and Cristina Kirchner.

In the case of the *corpus* in Portuguese, the names most often mentioned are the news accounts of the country's most important TV channels and newspapers, both the mainstream media and the alternative media, as well as soccer teams, fans and celebrities like former players and sports journalists.

²³ In Spanish: "Dalma y Gianinna se negaron a abrazar a Cristina Kirchner en el Velorio de Diego Maradona. #VerguenzaNacional."

²⁴ In Spanish: "Su desobediencia fue plantarse ante el bloqueo contra Cuba, apoyar la revolución Bolivariana en Venezuela, jugar fútbol con Evo y apoyar la paz en Colombia, siempre cuando las voces sonaban tibias."

²⁵ In Spanish: "Este gusto por el pueblo, Diego Maradona lo vivirá también fuera de la cancha. Pero sus expediciones junto a Fidel Castro y a Hugo Chávez tendrán el gusto de una derrota amarga. Es sin duda en la cancha donde Maradona hizo la revolución."

regime in this medium. The distinction between original tweets and retweets also allows us to differentiate between the dimensions of discursive production and circulation. Hence, the presence of a large number of retweets explains the citation, rewriting, reading and rereading of a politicized Maradona linked to the left. Involved is a dispute over the circulation of the word, which can also be explored by the researcher.

3.2 Technique for Constituting a Wordcloud: From Visible Forms to the Capture of Forces

With the aim of creating another entry point to the *corpus* in order to explore the possibilities for restoring the tensions that permeate the collected material, we decided to use the technique of creating wordclouds that highlight the most frequent terms in the tweets. On this point, it is necessary to emphasize that, from the discursive perspective, we do not consider the wordcloud as an end point in itself or as an objective synthesis but instead as part of the process of constituting a cartography for the analysis of discourse on a large scale, which is guided by the directive according to which “crystallized forms are not immune to the renewing aspect of de-structuring forces” (Deusdará, Rocha & Arantes, 2016, p.65).²⁸

This involves the constitution of a space in which it is possible to visualize not a single monological plane but the multiple laminations of discourse. For this reason, we should not allow ourselves to be deceived by the two-dimensional nature of the cloud, since it actually articulates diverse semantic, spatiotemporal, social, ideological and cultural levels.

In fact, the cloud does not function as a synthesis but, much the opposite, as a heterogenic and polyphonic landscape of the discursive practices in a digital environment. The reading that we propose sustains transversal dimensions of the hierarchy of frequencies that visually structures the cloud, allowing the emergence of the plurality of voices, meanings and discursive formations present in it.

We analyse the resulting wordcloud, constituted by the 400 most frequent terms in the tweets in each language, not through an ideal of taxonomic objectivity that, based on classificatory criteria linked to the frequency of the presence (or absence) of items of

²⁸ In Portuguese: “formas cristalizadas não são imunes ao que há de renovador nas forças desestruturantes.” *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, 17 (3): 172-198, July/Sept. 2022. 189

meaning, formulates inferences relating to the social conditions of production and reception of discourses, as undertaken by Content Analysis (contrasted with the discursive perspective in Rocha & Deusdará, 2006). We conceive the wordcloud as a cartography that enables us to visualize (partially, given the limitations of the sample), the dialogical dimension, the interdiscursivity and the polemical character of this discursive space. As a map, it presents itself as a two-dimensional surface that reveals the hierarchy of the Twitter exchanges, with some voices and themes made more visible than others. It is the researcher's responsibility and task to search for tangential axes, to excavate the multidimensionality, to delimit conflicting subregions, zones of the polemical and the forbidden. In this way, the researcher is capable of indicating the always temporary relations that the discourses on Maradona instigate, not only affirming, but also establishing the others in relation to which one maintains a distance, and the digital battles that are created and established therein.

In the wordcloud in Spanish (Figure 1), we observe many words of regret linked to the player's death, to health, to the emotions stirred by his passing away. Terms of suspicion and searching for the cause of his death appear: some argue that he was murdered, many mention his use of drugs, while others point to the fight between family members over the inheritance.²⁹

The presence of words and terms linked to politics is highly significant, like the mentions of Cristina Kirchner, Fidel Castro and Alberto Fernández. There are also references to Maradona's humble origins in phrases like *cabecita negra* [black little head] (a traditionally derogatory, racialized term that has been politically charged during Argentina's history), which call attention to the player's ethnic-racial features. There are frequent mentions of socialism, anti-imperialism, Latin America and communism.

However, there are tweets that refer to the accusations against Diego Maradona of gender violence and of failing to recognize women's rights, including allegations of rape, femicide and paedophilia, and recall that he died on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, with tweets like: “@LauraPausini questioned the fact that on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women,

²⁹ As we were writing this article, on 10 March 2021, a march was held demanding justice in the inquiry into the player's death, including the presence of family members, his children and former wives, who demanded the “conviction of those responsible.” Some even called for the imprisonment of his doctor and lawyers who had been caring for him before his death.

4 Dialogism, Interdiscursivity and Polemic in the Digital World

In this article, we have explained and problematized techniques for capturing and producing a digital research *corpus* through the delimitation of a discursive space on Twitter surrounding the death of Maradona. The mention of Diego Maradona on Twitter allows us to rethink the permeability of words in relation to diverse social situations, spatiotemporal contexts and regions present in the *corpus*. Much more than a vehicle transmitting messages on a theme, the name of Maradona is mobilized to create different meanings, sometimes for opposite purposes, such as making demands, criticizing and supporting governments, denouncing, celebrating, paying homage, attracting attention and even engaging in marketing. In the tweets that mention Diego Maradona, different and contradictory postures appear with blurred boundaries between each other, voices that polemicize the political meaning of his figure as part of a global mass cultural industry.

This appears clearly in the techno-discursive practice of the @, a discursive technique through which subjects cite, repost and intervene in conversations.³⁴ The @ functions as a discursive technique that constructs communities, interpellates others, intervenes in debates, delimits polemical and antagonistic spaces, builds alliances and creates networks of adversaries and followers. A mark of interdiscursivity and of the relation with the Other, it points to the fact that the word Maradona is inserted in a multiplicity of incessant dialogues in different discursive communities. It reveals the form in which ‘Maradona,’ as the nucleus of a discursive field, articulates a range of heterogenic discursive spaces. On one hand, the sports industry, national and international journalism, media outlets like CNN, Globo, BBC, SKY, Fox and ESPN, as well as alternative media, and the show business industry. Maradona the celebrity is not limited to soccer but traces connections with others sports in the world and with music. On the other hand, Maradona the political figure appears in the different geolinguistic universes of English, Portuguese and Spanish: Maradona the anti-Peronist, or the Peronist Maradona, emblem of left-wing Latin American governments, with figures like Fidel Castro, Simón Bolívar, Chávez, Nicolás Maduro, Che Guevara and Lula da Silva, in alternative journalism, anti-imperialism, socialism and communism. As a techno-word,

³⁴ For analysis of the # hashtag as a techno-discursive practice, see BARONAS 2019.

the @ delimits a heterogenous space of support and critique, interpellation, celebration and opposition. As a polemical citation strategy, the techno-word @, along with RT (retweet), points to Maradona as the focal point of a discursive digital war that is not limited to the Latin American sphere but possesses a global reach, poised between liberalism and socialism, the left and the right, the alternative and the mainstream media.

We utilized a series of computer processing methodologies created in Wolfram Mathematica, techniques for capturing tweets through which we produced a research *corpus*. However, we sought to problematize the techniques of textual processing and analysis in a digital environment, not seeing them as representative syntheses, producers of illusory forms of signification, in the name of an ideal of objectivity and rationality from which we wish to shift away (Rocha & Deusdará, 2006, 2017). For us, the aim of the quantitative analysis was not to create a hierarchy determined by frequency: rather, it provided a means to produce a research *corpus*, delimiting large-scale regions of digital discourse that allow us to approximate the way in which the clashes are configured and become consolidated. We criticised the software used, Wolfram Mathematica – marked by geopolitical and linguistic hierarchies – but successfully worked round these limitations by creating our own interfaces in other languages, which produced positive results in terms of the possibilities for research.³⁵

As for the task of investigation, given the omnipresence of this type of analysis of *corpora* by specialists in Science and Technology Studies (STS), which do not contemplate the disputes over meanings and the geopolitical hierarchies and inequalities that pervade the platforms, we highlight the importance of the discourse analyst's point of view. In particular, the dialogic perspective, formulated by Bakhtin and with a productive impact on the discursive theory of Maingueneau, can offer valuable insights, helping us reflect on the form through which the discourse analyst can recover the diversity of voices within the digital discourse (Maingueneau, 2005). Instead of the observer of a finalized product (an evident temptation given the wordcloud as a paradigmatic synthetic visualization), we think of the digital discourse analyst as someone who constitutes the discursive space of analysis, delimiting the region in which the conflict is actualized and thereby giving form to the field of analysis. It is within this

³⁵ The complete code utilized for the research and analysis is available for open access on the Github platform: <https://github.com/AlejandraJosiowicz/Maradona>.

arena that the word ‘Maradona’ appears as a mark of a series of discursive disputes that traverse Latin American and global history.

In a context like the present in which the Covid-19 pandemic has triggered and exacerbated Latin American countries’ economic, political and social crises, the tweets on Maradona show forms of retelling a social and political history that re-actualizes. In a period of heightened social crisis, the word Maradona bears the trace of clashes that pervade Latin American and global history: the rise and crisis of anti-imperialist left-wing movements in Latin America and the world, the questions surrounding gender issues, the advance of the corporate media, as well as the emergence of alternative media, up to the health policies of the present moment. Maradona shows the delicate balance between polysemy and unity in one cultural figure.

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