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Komesu, Fabiana Cristina; Gambarato, Renira Rampazzo; Tenani, Luciani Ester

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'I will not become an Internet meme': visual-verbal textualization process in the study of the power and resistance in Brazil

'Não virarei meme': processo de textualização verbo-visual no estudo de poder e resistência no Brasil

Fabiana Cristina Komesu
Universidade Estadual Paulista, Brasil
fabiana.komesu@unesp.br

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Renira Rampazzo Gambarato
Universidade de Jönköping, Suecia

Luciani Ester Tenani
Universidade Estadual Paulista, Brasil

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ABSTRACT:

In this article, we analyze a delimited corpus of Internet memes showcasing Brazilian President Michel Temer. The theoretical framework is based on literacy studies, digital information and communication technology usage in research and teaching, and Bakhtin studies. The methodological design follows the approach of Gambarato and Komesu (2018), who selected and analyzed data sets of memes based on classification tools developed by Dawkins (1976) and Knobel and Lankshear (2007). The main goal is to discuss the relevance of using 'Internet memes', while studying the concept of 'text'. Therefore, regarding the mobilization of digital information and communication technologies, we consider how the appropriation of someone else's word takes place through verbal and visual-verbal elements potentially available to subjects on the Web. We aim to discuss effects of meaning deriving from the way these texts are disseminated across spreadable media, taking into account power and resistance relations between subjects of/in language.

KEYWORDS: digital literacy, internet memes, dialogical discourse analysis, Michel Temer.

RESUMO:

Neste artigo, analisamos um corpus delimitado de memes da Internet sobre o presidente brasileiro Michel Temer. O referencial teórico é baseado em Estudos de Letramentos e no uso de tecnologia de informação e comunicação digital na pesquisa e no ensino, de um lado, e em Estudos de Bakhtin, de outro. A abordagem metodológica é baseada no trabalho de Gambarato e Komesu (2018), na releitura pelas autoras feita com base em Dawkins (1976) e Knobel e Lankshear (2007). O objetivo principal é discutir a relevância de usar os chamados 'memes da internet' no estudo do conceito de 'texto'. Será considerada como a 'apropriação da palavra do outro' se dá através de elementos verbais e verbo-visuais potencialmente disponíveis aos sujeitos na web. Interessa discutir efeitos de sentido decorrentes da forma como esses textos são disseminados em mídias propagáveis, levando-se em conta relações de poder e resistência entre sujeitos da/na linguagem.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: letramento digital, memes da internet, análise dialógica do discurso, Michel Temer.

THE POWER OF (STUDYING) INTERNET MEMES IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS 1

Knobel and Lankshear (2007), Bauckhage (2011), Shifman (2013), Dynel (2016), and Gambarato and Komesu (2018) are some of the authors who have mentioned and discussed in their works the concept of (Internet) memes. As Dynel (2016, p. 661, emphasis in original) posits, the term "[...] derived from the Ancient Greek *mi#me#ma*, 'something imitated' [...]" and was coined by the biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976, "[...] who defined it as a cultural unit [...] that infects individual minds and seeks replication by imitation for the sake of its own survival". Knobel and Lankshear (2007, p. 202, emphasis in original) define

'meme' as 'online memes' (or Internet memes, as they are also termed) due to "[...] the rapid uptake and spread of a particular idea presented as a written text, image, language 'move', or some other unit of cultural 'stuff'". Bauckhage (2011, p. 1, italics in the original text) emphasizes that "[...] the term *Internet meme* refers to the phenomenon of content or concepts that spread rapidly among Internet users". It is an explanation of "[...] how rumors, catch-phrases, melodies, or fashion trends replicate through a population [...]", by instant messaging apps or social networking sites (Bauckhage, 2011, p. 1). However, this concept of "[...] Internet meme [...]" is far from agreed upon among popular folk theory scholars and academics (Dynel, 2016, p. 661-662).

Gambarato and Komesu (2018, p. 87), reporting the addition of the entry 'meme' in the reputed American dictionary *Merriam-Webster* in 2015 (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018), observe at the same time "[...] the strength and social relevance of memes [...]" but also "[...] the problematic nature of a confusing definition, mixing ethereal (internalized) forms such as ideas and externalized references such as specific representations" (Cannizzaro apud Gambarato & Komesu, 2018, p. 87). This 'conceptual troublemaker' (Shifman, 2013) could be related to a kind of epistemological problem, as the term 'meme' coined by a biologist has been broadly adapted and adopted in different disciplines, such as psychology and philosophy or anthropology and linguistics, maintaining analogies from biology. The first recurrent analogy, "[...] meme-as-virus analogy sees the similarity between memes and disease agents [...]", is noted in the common discourse about viral content on the Internet (Shifman, 2013, p. 365). The problem asserted by Jenkins, Krauskopf, and Green (2009 apud Shifman, 2013, p. 366, emphasis in original) is that this metaphor overwhelms an idea that people are "[...] passive creatures, susceptible to the domination of meaningless media 'snacks' that infect their minds". The second problem is derived from taking genetics as model, especially because "[...] the reduction of culture to biology narrows and simplifies complex human behaviors". This reductionist comparison is also highlighted by Cannizzaro (2016, p. 572).

For Shifman (2013, p. 363), the replication/adaptation ideas resulting from memes should be analyzed from a communication-oriented perspective, as many shifts have occurred during the digital era, such as the transition from "[...] interpersonal and mass, professional and amateur, bottom-up and top-down communications [...]" Shifman (2013, p. 363), referring to Jenkins' (2006) discussion about the convergence of media platforms, states that "[...] memes have become more relevant than ever to communication scholarship" (Shifman, 2013, p. 363) considering that they could be investigated through interpersonal contacts and institutional sources for the masses.

Furthermore, Shifman (2013, p. 362, emphasis in original) comments on the lack of consensus between "[...] enthusiastic advocates', who believe that memes explain 'everything', and their adversaries, who are critical because memes change 'absolutely nothing'". The absence of change, in this case, is associated with the absence of tools or insights "[...] beyond those employed in traditional disciplines such as cultural anthropology or linguistics" (Shifman, 2013, p. 364). In the field of applied linguistics, especially concerning literacy education, Knobel and Lankshear (2007, p. 221) point out that the investigation of Internet memes as Literacy practices involves "[...] much more than simply passing on and/or adding to written or visual texts or information per se (i.e., literacy)". It is considered a traditional concept of text, based on a technical or an instrumental perspective of language. 'Rather', the authors state, "[... Internet memes as Literacy practices] are tied directly to ways of interacting with others, to meaning making, and to ways of being, knowing, learning and doing" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 221). For these authors, the study of Internet memes can contribute "[...] to identifying the limitations of narrow conceptions of literacy and new technologies in classrooms" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 221). Contributions do not stop there in the domain of literacy education, as Knobel and Lankshear (2007, p. 221) consider that understanding successful Internet memes "[...] can also help with understanding new forms of social participation and influence in everyday life [...]", which means going beyond the boundaries of literacy education and affecting many other fields regarding social participation.

Since 2003, when Lankshear and Knobel first recognized memes as a 'new' literacy, the authors have been interested in discussing Internet memes as active/activist literacies: "Among various other features concerning learning in particular, affinity spaces instantiate participation, collaboration, distribution and dispersion of expertise, and relatedness" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 207). The focus on new literacies, on digital literacies, and in particular, on the study of Internet memes allows thinking about a 'new' apprentice (students but also teachers), the long-awaited critical citizen - a critical reader prepared to interact in a democratic organization (Cassany, 2011) - who can learn, share knowledge and expertise, choosing 'the' best-quality information for him/herself, recognizing conflicting views and knowing how to justify his or her own opinion.

As James Paul Gee (1996; 2004) distinguishes D/discourse and R/reading, Knobel and Lankshear (2007, p. 219, emphasis in original) distinguish, in turn, 'big L' 'L'iteracies from 'little l' 'l'iteracies, explaining that

For us, Literacy, with a 'big L' refers to making meaning in ways that are tied directly to life and to being in the world (cf. Freire 1972, Street 1984). That is, whenever we use language we are making some sort of significant or socially recognizable 'move' that is inextricably tied to someone bringing into being or realizing some element or aspect of their world. This means that literacy, with a 'small l', describes the actual processes of reading, writing, viewing, listening, manipulating images and sound, etc., making connections between different ideas, and using words and symbols that are part of these larger, more embodied Literacy practices.

We can say this is an attempt by the authors to relate literacy events (literacy with a 'small l') and social practices (Literacy with a 'big L'), thus broadening the reach of literacy studies, commonly recognized as concerning only the interests of linguistics or education itself. This distinction regarding L/literacy also helps to understand Internet meme research in a different way, far from a "[...] level of static, fixed-in time texts, focusing on practices that are larger than reading and writing [...]" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 219), therefore, larger than a technical or instrumental view of language. 'Memetics' - as "[...] the theoretical and empirical science that studies the replication, spread and evolution of memes [...]" (Heylighen & Chielens apud Shifman, 2013, p. 363-364) - can be devised in association with 'big L' Literacy practices, enabling the investigation of "[...] meaning making, social significance-making, and identity-making in one's life worlds [...]" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 220) to interest not only literacy education but also other research domains focused on "[...] new forms of social participation and civic action in the wake of widespread access to the internet and involvement in increasingly dispersed social networks" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 222).

As these authors highlight, "[...] studying memetic engineering may well prove to be an important component of classroom critical literacy approaches to understanding social power and influence" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 224). This study is relevant in a 'postmodern/post-industrial/knowledge society paradigm' that wants to be recognized for organizing social literacy practices around ideas "[...] more 'participatory', more 'collaborative', and more 'distributed'; less 'published', less 'individuated', and less 'author-centric' than conventional literacies" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 29, emphasis in original). Understanding the concept of Internet memes within this new paradigm allows researchers to rethink conventional approaches to text analysis, this time, and take into account "[...] new forms of social participation and cultural production that generated the phenomenon under examination [...]", with the possibility of helping apprentices in their "[...] (ethical) decision-making, social actions and their relations with others" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 225). This scenario is quite different from the biological vision of meme, which prioritizes 'internalized' forms, disregarding 'complex human behaviors' per Cannizzaro (2016).

Bakhtin's contribution and the dialogical discourse analysis

For the study of Internet memes as new literacies, Knobel and Lankshear (2007) take on a discursive perspective, based on authors such as Fairclough (1992) and Gee (1996). For example, the question of power Knobel and Lankshear discuss is connected to important references such as Michel Foucault (1980). For language studies and for text studies, in particular, we would like to add the contribution of Bakhtin (1984a; b) and his Circle and dialogical discourse analysis. The study of Internet memes can be more productive if it is associated with a dialogic approach, one that conceives “[...] language in its concrete living totality, and not language as the specific object of linguistics” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 181). Bakhtin highlights the relevance of polyphony in the treatment of discourse and aspects of ‘the concrete life of the word’, concerning the concept of subject as another one instead of subject as an object. This notion of subject, ‘divided’ in the utterance process between ‘I’ and ‘you’, is crucial to differentiate the contribution of Bakhtin and his Circle’s works, especially in the investigation of Internet memes, contributing to observe how the ‘appropriation of someone else’s word’ takes place through verbal and visual-verbal elements in the composition of the text. This conception of subject also differs from other discursive studies that deem the subject an ‘individual’ who deals with another ‘individual’, even if this treatment takes place in a social and historical context. Shifman (2013), for example, from a communication-oriented perspective, considered that Internet memes “[...] may best be understood as cultural information that passes along from person to person, yet gradually scales into a shared social phenomenon” (Shifman, 2013, p. 364-365, italics in the original text).

For Bakhtin (1984a), the constitutional otherness of the subject (of the language) implies an evaluation of the discourse from the point of view of the discourse’s relations with the discourse of the other, according to different types of bivocality, such as parody (see Bakhtin, 1984a; Brait, 2009). Parody can be seen as a way to examine the presence of the other in discourse (see Brait, 1996). Bakhtin (1984a, p. 193) highlights that in a parody the author “[...] speaks in someone else’s discourse [...]”, but the parody “[...] introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one”. As Bakhtin explains, “The second voice, once having made its home in the other’s discourse, clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims. Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 193).

In the delimited corpus of Internet memes showcasing Brazilian President Michel Temer and his official attempt to prohibit the use of his image in Internet memes, we will observe some parodies of the president in this regard. The creation of these Internet memes, mixing images and words attributed to certain characteristics of the other, understood as worthy of criticism, appears as a form of subversion: as Bakhtin highlights, a battle arena in which the power and resistance of the subjects emerge in the discourse.

To conclude this section in which we briefly remark on the relevance of the study of Internet memes in the field of applied linguistics, we would like to briefly comment on humor in Internet memes. Humor is a complex phenomenon investigated from different perspectives, from psychology to communication and linguistics. In a more traditional approach to linguistic studies, the criticism is that the study of Internet memes cannot be taken seriously, because the production of humor content cannot be the object of classroom study or is not appropriate for knowledge production in the school environment. In Brazil, as Carmelino and Ramos (2015) ponder, although the production of linguistic research on humor is still little known or diffused, this production has the power to dialogue with different linguistic theories. As Carmelino and Ramos mention, the production of linguistic research on humor shows, for example, the presence of diversified linguistic strategies used to produce humor in jokes (punch-line mechanism, explained by several linguistic aspects such as phonetic, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and discursive, among others). It also shows how social aspects can be materialized in jokes, highlighting crystallized prejudices in the form of stereotypes (see Kotthoff, 2006; the special issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics* dedicated to gender

and humor). Therefore, the study of humor is relevant to constructing criticism in/of language, with the possibility of contributing to other areas of production of knowledge.

Regarding the study of Internet memes, Gambarato and Komesu (2018, p. 99) conclude that humor

(a) facilitates the diffusion of content, (b) catches the audience's attention, (c) can inspire positive feelings and alleviate tensions, despite the critical message it may convey (Chagas et al., 2015; Shifman, 2013b) and (d) contributes to the construction of collective identities and experiences of shared literacy (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007).

From a dialogical discourse analysis perspective, we underscore the relevance of laughter in humor. The concept of carnivalization proposed by Bakhtin (1984a; b) concerns a powerful worldview- a "[...] carnival sense of the world [...]" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 107) - according to which one can take a critical awareness of the existence of at least two worlds: the official one, where the masters of power live, and the unofficial world, where those oppressed by power live (Bernardi, 2009, p. 78). In this dialogical concept of language, there is an opportunity for the subject to observe the constitution "[...] top to bottom [...]", the inversion between high and low, "[...] in a special relationship to reality" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 107). As a "[...] carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators [...]" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 122), so the production of Internet memes can be understood without this division, in a folksier way in the digital era. These different points of view that constitute the subject and the otherness are the basis for a dialogic approach to language and the study of texts, concerning the development of a critical awareness in the process of reading and writing Internet memes.

DATA SET AND METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research used a data set from which the most representative memes for analysis were extracted. The data set comprises six Internet memes showcasing Brazilian President Michel Temer (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* [PMDB]). To understand our specific interest in this particular data set, we first briefly present the event that triggered the emergence of these texts/memes.

On May 23, 2017, the Department of Image Creation and Publishing, part of the federal government Secretariat of Social Communication, sent to Brazilian bloggers a notification pointing out that the use of official images of President Michel Temer were allowed for journalistic purposes and for government action ads. Images used for other purposes (such as Internet memes) require prior approval from the government and must be followed by the photographer credit. From the perspective of the Brazilian government, use of the president's image was a matter of copyright. The Department is empowered by a Brazilian copyright law (law 9.610/98, article 24, item II), according to which the photographer has moral rights to have his or her name, nickname, or conventional signature indicated or announced as the author's, in the use of his or her work.

Differently from the government perspective, meaning-making, however, is not derived from an individual or a single voice, as the official, legal, or corporate one, but is 'divided' in a way that is not always (if ever) consensual or homogenous, because meaning-making results from a dialogical conception of language that takes into account other relevant perspectives for the production of meaning, as 'an arena of battle between voices', as Bakhtin (1984a) well defined. Therefore, the so-called Temer's veto of memes can be analyzed in relation to other views, without which this event would not be pertinent to linguistics. For example, from a civilian point of view, this decision to prohibit the use of images of the president that do not indicate the author credit was understood by Internet users as a censorship attempt to prohibit political activism, critical discourse, and democracy on the Web (and outside it). From a popular culture perspective, but also an academic one, claiming the attribution of the author credit in images spread in the digital context is absolutely

contrary to the remix culture (Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008; Buzato, Silva, Coser, Barros, & Sachs, 2013) and the creative functioning of the Web (Shirky, 2011).

Regarding the research methods, the methodological design of this study is based on Gambarato and Komesu's (2018) approach. The authors present the taxonomy developed in the original Dawkins (1976) work to characterize successful memes, namely, fidelity, fecundity, and longevity, in addition to the patterns proposed by Knobel and Lankshear (2007), as factors that contribute to an Internet meme's fecundity, namely, humor, intertextuality, and juxtaposition. Gambarato and Komesu (2018) used Dawkins' (1976) and Knobel and Lankshear's (2007) classification tools to select and analyze Internet memes that feature former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff. Based on this methodological contribution, we selected the data set concerning the so-called Temer's veto of memes.

The selected Internet memes were collected on the Internet via the search engines Google and Bing, using the keywords 'Temer', 'veto', and 'meme' (which are the same in Portuguese and in English), during November 2017. The Google search generated around 250,000 results for all (written texts and images), and the Bing search resulted in 46,700 entries. However, a large part of the results concerned journalistic news written about the event, in Brazil and abroad, other presidential vetoes signed by Temer or former president Dilma Rousseff, and political memes about other themes regarding Temer or Rousseff. Only 12 memes directly addressed Temer's veto of memes.

Following Gambarato and Komesu (2018), we observed the repeatability issue was a key factor, regarding the aspect of fecundity: 'which is the meme's capacity to be memorable and spread extensively across digital media'. In practical terms, this means that we observed which of these 12 preselected memes were the most commonly shared. To do so, the Google for image search tool was used. As a result, a corpus of six memes, 50% of those found by the initial search, was defined. The selection process was focused on memes in which the president appears in the position of an enunciator prohibiting or complaining about the creation of Internet memes.

'I will not become an Internet meme': Data analysis

Based on Temer's veto of memes, Internet users created a series of Internet memes in Portuguese, in which the president is represented as someone who prohibits or complains about the creation of Internet memes. The official notification was not signed by the Brazilian president but by the Department of Image Creation and Publishing. Although the main issue from the institutional point of view is a matter of copyright of the president's image, the voice heard by the Internet users, however, was from the president himself. The message received and interpreted by Internet users was that concerning censorship and prohibition of criticism. The answer came fast and as mockery and derision.

In Figure 1, the Internet meme is composed of the following verbal text: '*Não virarei meme!/Repito: não virarei meme!*' ['I will not become an Internet meme!/I repeat: I will not become an Internet meme!']. The visual-verbal juxtaposition in this case is formed by an image of the president during a public speech.



FIGURE 1.

Internet meme referring to Temer's desire not to become a meme himself. Retrieved from <http://www.midiamax.com.br/comportamento/planalto-vetar-uso-imagens-memes-pt-oferece-acervo-imagens-presidente-342437>

On the left, there are two flags: One is the Brazilian flag, and the other is the Brazilian presidential flag. The Brazilian presidential flag is hoisted at the government headquarters, at the president's official residence, and in government buildings whenever the president is present. This flag is similar to the personal flag of Dom Pedro II of Portugal and the Portuguese presidential flag. Brazil was under the yoke of Portugal between the 16 and 19th centuries. From a social-historical viewpoint, the presence of this symbol distinguishes the 'masters of power' in the face of those who do not have the power of government. The president occupies a pulpit with two microphones. At the bottom is the official symbol of his government, which reproduces the motto of the Brazilian flag, 'Order and Progress'. The president's sober corporal expression, with his finger in the air, leaves no doubt about the seriousness of the subject matter of his speech. But this image is completely shattered by the verbal text, a parody of what would have been said by the president. If, on the one hand, the sobriety of the image can be seen from a professorial perspective, on the other hand, the gesture of the index finger in the air with the rest of the hand closed may indicate domination, superiority, evoking negative feelings and aggression, such as in a verbal attack.

We can also 'hear' in this parody the president's statement: "I will not resign! I repeat: I will not resign!" as Bakhtin (1984a, p. 194) argues, "[...] the depth of the parody may also vary". In this case, superficial verbal forms are taken by Internet users in the appropriation of someone else's discourse, but in a very different way, in a carnivalesque manner, per Bakhtin (1984a; b). This presidential statement was pronounced on May 18, 2017, one day after the leaking of audio recordings of Joesley Batista, one of the owners of JSB Brazilian company, the largest (by sales) meat processing company in the world. Batista made the recording in a private conversation outside the president's official agenda. Allegedly, Temer was given permission to give hush money to a jailed associate, former deputy Eduardo Cunha (the president's political party). Faced with this scenario of such harsh accusations and evidence, the president's resignation was expected, but it did not occur.

Figure 2, 3, and 4 show the fecundity of the idea that an official notice signed by the president prohibited the production of memes. In Figure 2, a pouting, upset president says, *Não pode fazer meme* ('You cannot make a meme'). In the production of Internet memes, the 'You cannot make a meme' expression is also used as irony: You cannot do a meme if you are the meme. In this case, the prohibition that turns up in an authoritarian context implies, 'You cannot make a meme if I am the meme'. The enunciator who assumes 'I' is assigned to the president in his legitimized position of power.

The solemnity emanating from the presidency 'shares' the space with the image of a person acting almost like a pouting child (Figure 2). The visual-verbal composition of this Internet meme brings together, in

a dialogical way, seriousness/playfulness, prohibition/freedom of expression, copyright/anonymity, and authority/insubordination in the relationship between dominant classes and popular will. These apparent contradictions coexist in the same text, producing humor and the possibility of criticism by readers.



FIGURE 2

Internet meme 'You cannot do a meme'. Retrieved from <http://woomagazine.com.br/quando-o-plano-nao-da-certo-temer-veta-seus-memes-e-se-torna-foco-deles/>



FIGURE 3

Internet meme 'Now you cannot make memes anymore'. Retrieved from https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2017/05/29/interna_politica,872517/veto-de-temer-a-memes-vira-noticia-no-new-york-times.shtml



FIGURE 4.

Internet meme of Temer's complaint about memes. Retrieved from https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2017/05/29/interna_politica,872517/veto-de-temer-a-memes-vira-noticia-no-new-york-times.shtml

In Figure 3, the choleric message *'Agora não pode mais fazer meme'* ('Now you cannot make memes anymore') seems to be shouted as an official statement. The president's facial expression is highlighted in the upper left side of the image, becoming its focal point, because the verbal text appears only in the lower half of the image. In the background, we can observe, once again, the reference to the motto 'Order and Progress', as if the president is autocratically defending or restoring the country's 'order' with the meme's veto, while the carnivalesque voice of the people is shouting for democratic 'progress' in the ironic meme.

The Internet meme in Figure 4 is derived from the one in Figure 3. However, in Figure 4, the presumed president's notification is reinterpreted as a childish complaint. Following the first framework in the meme, the second one shows a Michel Temer with a contorted face and closed eyes. The facial expression with unrounded lips that can be seen in the image refers to a facial configuration similar to or quite similar to the typical configuration of the pronunciation of the vowel [i] in Portuguese. The text *'Agora não pode mais fazer meme'* ('Now you cannot make memes anymore') is represented in the second framework as *'Aguiri ni pidi mis fizir mimi'*, whining or crying known in Brazilian popular culture as 'mimimi'. 'Mimimi' is a kind of onomatopoeia that reproduces the sound of a complaining cry or whining. All vowels in the first sentence (except the first 'a' in *'agora'*) are replaced by the vowels [i] and [u]: The vowel 'o' in *'agora'* is replaced by 'ui' and all the other vowels, by the vowel 'i'. The syllable 'go' in the adverb *'agora'* (now) is written 'gui', a Portuguese diphthong that sounds like 'gee' in English and suggests the first verbal sounds made by young children. These vowel changes aim to reproduce baby talk in Portuguese and moreover, characterize a complaining cry or 'mimimi'. The meaning produced in this meme is pejorative, because it is a form of criticism or mockery of the other: The president speaks or complains like an infant who does not even know how to talk.

The representation of the president as a child seems to be an inversion: from an authoritarian father/president to an angry spoiled child. Internet users would have understood that the notification prohibiting the use of images of the president without prior authorization as a form of warning to children: Now you can no longer play (with Internet memes). There is no discussion with children, just direct orders that must be obeyed. For Internet users, perhaps, there should have been at least some kind of democratic debate on the subject, but they received only a direct notification. The image of the serious man with remarkable oratory and eloquence is inverted in this parody, showing how the subject appropriates the words of the other. In this Bakhtinian arena of battle between two voices, Internet users allegedly have less power than the official voice that promulgates what must be done (or not done, in this case). The allegedly lesser power of the people, however, does not cease to be practiced by the subjects as a force of resistance against the others, in this situation, the president's official notification. The Bakhtinian carnival is established by the parodic Internet memes, subverting and liberating the assumptions of the dominant presidential power.

The infantilized representation of the president is used again in Figure 5: '*Não me usa como meme que eu te dou um beliscão*' ('Do not use me as a meme otherwise I give you a pinch'). The effect of this visual-verbal text is produced by the word 'pinch' and by the image of the president's right hand, joining the index finger and the thumb, implying a pinch. In this sense, the threat seems more real, but it is harmless because it is a mere pinch - the same kind of threat children make when they feel intimidated.



FIGURE 5.

A childish Internet meme about Temer's veto of memes.

Retrieved from <https://bhaz.com.br/2017/05/23/memes-temer>

As Bakhtin (1984a, p. 193) posits, a parody introduces in the discourse "[...] a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one". In this scenario, who is more intimidating? The forces are certainly asymmetrical, but this does not mean that the power in/of language is not being contested by the subjects on all sides, especially those considered inferior.

In Figure 6, the last Internet meme of the data set analyzed, the voice of the president is 'heard' in the answer pronounced by no less a person than Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, one of the world's richest men. In this fictitious conversation, Gates says the following: "*Não, Michel... Não dá pra eu 'desligar a internet' de quem faz memes...*" ("No, Michel ... I cannot 'disconnect the Internet' from the ones who make memes..."). The use of the negative ('*não*') is the indication of what would have been asked by the president of the 'owner' of the Internet: Is it possible to 'disconnect the Internet' from those who make Internet memes? In this imaginary conversation between powerful friends, the arrogance of the powerful and the ridiculousness of trying to control the production of Internet memes are exposed. After all, it is a critique of those who attempt to control meaning-making in language.



FIGURE 6.

Bill Gates and Michel Temer Internet meme. Retrieved from <http://bhaz.com.br/2017/05/23/memes-temer/>

At the bottom of Figure 6, on the right, is a logo that is the signature of the creator of this Internet meme, 'Planalto Memes'. The drawing represents Planalto Palace (designed by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer), the official workplace of the Brazilian president. Once again, the appropriation of someone else's word takes place through verbal and visual-verbal elements, mocking the circumstances of the event depicted in the image. In this case, the parody relies on the generator of this Internet meme as coming from the center of the executive power, Planalto Palace, although it comes from Planalto Memes.

Furthermore, in linguistic terms, is pivotal to notice that the use of denial is an important linguistic remark that is present in this entire data set. The selected corpus of six Internet memes always employs the adverb of negation in the construction of the memes' verbal text. '*Não*' ('no') restores the otherness to denial of what would have been said by the other: 'Watch out! You will become an Internet meme!'/'I will not become an Internet meme!' (Figure 1); 'We can make Internet memes!'/ 'You cannot make memes' (Figure 2); 'We will still make memes!'/ 'Now you cannot make memes anymore' (Figure 3, 4); 'We will use you as a meme!'/ 'Do not use me as a meme' (Figure 5); "No, Michel ... I cannot 'disconnect the Internet' from the ones who make meme [...]"/'Bill, could you please disconnect the Internet from the ones who make memes?' In Figure 1 to 5, the co-enunciators are the Internet users and the creators of the Internet memes. The enunciator complains or sometimes threatens or intimidates the other, but the strength of his words and gestures is weakened and ridiculed in these parodies, lowering the other from his position of power. Sometimes, as we have seen, the representation of the president is reduced to a child having a tantrum, without arguments. The inversion of what is understood from the perspective of the Internet users is highlighted: 'We are not children! You are a child who does not know how to argue, you can only give orders!' The second voice (the voice of the Internet users) is the one that stands out in these Internet memes.

We must also read these Internet memes in a broader context, as proposed by Knobel and Lankshear (2007), relating literacy events (literacy with a 'small l') and social practices (Literacy with a 'big L'). From the perspective of the Brazilian government, the official notification concerning the use of images of the president was understood as a matter of copyright. In digital culture, the copyright law is a relevant issue that cannot be denied. But this point of view coexists with the matter of freedom of expression around ideas like "[...] more 'participatory', more 'collaborative', and more 'distributed' [...]", as Lankshear and Knobel (2011, p. 29, emphasis in original) argue, and with the possibility of doing political criticism via Internet memes. Overall, Internet users understood the official notification as a censorship attempt, the reaction of a head of state accused of involvement in a series of corruption scandals, obstruction of justice, and vote-buying in the lower house of Congress to support political decisions.

In October 2017, the journalist Dom Phillips quoted the independent watchdog Open Accounts to report that at that moment, the Brazilian government had already 'agreed to spend \$1,33bn on projects in the states of lawmakers who were due to vote' (Phillips, 2017), a political maneuver to get support and get rid

of allegations of corruption. In the broader context of social literate practices, it is relevant to consider that Michel Temer, the vice president in Dilma Rousseff's administration, became president following the formal impeachment process that culminated in her removal from office, on August 31, 2016. Different analysts in Brazil and abroad consider, however, that this parliamentary impeachment process was illegitimate and represents the rupture of democracy in Brazil (Barcia, 2016; Jinkings, Doria, & Cleto, 2016; Souza, 2016; Guerra et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, 'Temer has retained the support of financial markets who like the austerity measures he has introduced, such as privatising government services, a 20-year cap on expenditure and a planned pensions overhaul', which configures 'an authoritarian solution to the crisis' (Phillips, 2017). From a civil perspective, the official notification regarding the use of images of the president appears as another 'authoritarian solution', an attempt to silence critics.

FINDINGS AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of this study was to analyze a delimited corpus of Internet memes showcasing Brazilian President Michel Temer. We introduced a theoretical framework based on Literacy Studies concerning Internet memes. We briefly highlighted the relevance of studying Internet memes in applied linguistics, regarding the pertinence of using so-called 'Internet memes' while studying the concept of 'text'. Considering that the discursive perspective adopted by Knobel and Lankshear (2007) seems to conceive a notion of (a single) subject that interacts with another (single) subject in a social and historical space, we introduced the contributions of Bakhtin (1984a; b) and a dialogical discourse analysis centered on the otherness. The constitutional otherness of the subject implies the evaluation of the discourse from a viewpoint of the discourse's relations with the discourse of the other. We analyzed the Internet memes considering the presence of the other in the discourse. Based on the methodological contribution of Gambarato and Komesu (2018), we selected a data set of six Internet memes concerning what has become known as President Michel Temer's veto of memes. Although the number of Internet memes might seem limited, the analysis was productive for the purposes of this article. Another article could evaluate the distribution and circulation of these specific memes in social networks.

The assumption of a Dialogical Discourse Analysis perspective was relevant to discuss the visual-verbal textualization process of Internet memes. We considered how appropriation of someone else's word takes place through verbal and visual-verbal elements, as a kind of 'inversion' of the roles that each one would have assigned to the other. The use of serious, austere, and energetic images is 'inverted' in the creation of these Internet memes in which the president is represented as a complaining child or an authoritarian despot.

The legitimate request for respect of copyright laws is read as censorship, an attempt to silence critics. A data set of political Internet memes seems to be specially interesting, as (any) discourse, as Bakhtin (1984a) emphasizes, must take place in 'an arena of battle'. The data set analyzed, relating L/literacies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), demonstrates the complexity of language: seriousness and playfulness, prohibition and freedom of expression, copyright and anonymity, authority and insubordination in the relationship between dominant classes and popular will coexist in the same text, producing humor but also a possibility of criticism through reading and writing Internet memes, in the evaluation of power and resistance relations between subjects of/in language.

In Applied Linguistics, the humor produced by Internet memes is a trigger to discuss how texts are constituted by verbal and visual-verbal elements. It is also a chance to demonstrate another conception of language, broader than a technical or instrumental one, which takes into account a dialogically constituted social-historical context. The study of Internet memes allows (1) discussing the established knowledge about different subjects and prejudices; (2) discussing the boundaries between censorship and freedom of expression in democracies; (3) teaching students to check information in reliable sources in this post-truth

context; (4) analyzing the distribution of information and its impact according to spreadable media (Jenkins, Green, & Ford, 2013); and (5) considering how power and resistance constitute the complexity of language. Reading, writing, and producing Internet memes in a digital and convergent culture is an opportunity to develop critical awareness in relation to others.

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NOTES

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