

# FACE AND (IM)POLITENESS IN TERMS OF ADDRESS USED IN ONLINE NEWS AND FAKE NEWS

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## Abstract

In digital space, users engage in interactive mediated experiences to meet a human ‘compulsion of proximity’ (Boden & Molotch, 1994), while being expected to follow a certain ‘netiquette’ (Shea 1994). Nonetheless, there is still a gap when considering the proximation (Cap 2006, 2006, 2013, 2022, Kopytowska 2018, 2022) and (im)politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, cf. Wieczorek, 2008, Korostenskiene, 2020 for a correlation of the two) employed on (dis)information media. According to the selection criterion within health, science, and well-being discourse domains, this paper focuses on the analysis of terms of address used in eight Portuguese corpora of online news websites (particularly, *Diário de Notícias*, *Público*, *Sábado* and *Visão*) and websites labelled as fake news producers (namely *Altamente*, *Lusojornal2015/Lusoamanhecer*, *Magazine Lusa*, and *Vamos Lá Portugal*), following Pena’s (2018, 2019) classification. On the one hand, the research findings show that news websites barely use the personal pronouns *tu* (→ ‘you’) and *você* (→ ‘you’) as informal terms of address to avoid being impolite or threatening the hearer’s/reader’s face. On the other hand, on fake news outlets, the larger use of *tu* (→ ‘you’) and *você* (→ ‘you’) could be regarded as potential face-threatening acts, despite being mainly used as (inter)personal and/or emotional proximation strategies. Proximising through (im)politeness, all corpora also use first-person plural pronouns, displaying a tendency to include the hearer(s)/reader’s.

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## 1 Introduction

Fake news, although likely to be transversal to human communication since ancient times (e.g. Soll, 2016, Shu et al., 2017, Tandoc Jr et al., 2018, Balachandran et al., 2023 or King, 2023), has been an unfolding issue since 2016 due to its political implications in the North American presidential elections (Bounegru et al., 2018, Pennycook et al., 2018, Bovet & Makse, 2019, Grinberg et al., 2019, Prior, 2019). The rising popularity of this phenomenon is directly correlated to the decline of the trust and reputation of journalism (cf. the Reuters Institute Surveys published in

Digital News Report Portugal, 2018, 2020 and 2022 as well as Digital News Report Portugal, 2021, 2019 and 2023 for a detailed overview). However, as highlighted by the European Commission (2018), Vosoughi et al. (2018) or the European Concilium (2020), the scope of fake news has been proven to be far greater than journalism and politics<sup>1</sup>. Thus far, the hybrid discursive genre of fake news (as described by Mourão & Robertson, 2019, Robertson & Mourão, 2020, Nunes, 2020) has been said to have disinformation repercussions that could potentially affect science, research, education, economy and finance, as well as citizens well-being overall (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Andrade, 2018, Ireton & Posetti, 2018, Merchant & Asch, 2018).

The reason for its wide range of action lies its very nature or defining features. Despite its unstable definition being unstable and target of constant changes, different typologies or even distinct applications (cf. Rubin et al. 2015, Wardle, 2016, 2017, Bounegru et al., 2018, Rashkin et al., 2017, Tambini, 2017, Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, ERC, 2019, OberCom, 2019), fake news may be defined, at least for the purposes of this research, as a restricted type of disinformation which only involves intentionally created and disseminated content. This genre mimics the news report format and layout as one of its core goals is to be recognised as news, despite presenting content that can be confirmed to be either entirely forged and false, or decontextualised, manipulated, and partially inaccurate.

Another very specific motivation directly correlated to this genre is its medium of proliferation. Almost by default, disinformation outlets consist of news-like websites which rapidly spread their publication in all sorts of social media, being Facebook<sup>2</sup>, Twitter<sup>3</sup>, or WhatsApp<sup>4</sup>, some of the main ones.

Most disinformation outlets benefit from *AdNetwork* services or have the potential to enable advertisement-based revenue, whose profits depend on the number of clicks and views. Put simply, the number of accesses is what determines the revenue (for details see Google Ads, 2021, for instance), which leads to a decrease in content quality and rapid sharing. Despite profit being the main purpose for the production and spreading of fake news, non-economic motivations listed by Wardle, 2016 2017, Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, include political, propagandistic and ideological purposes.

The increase of disinformation threatens the consecution of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, A/RES/70/1 2015) which includes as some pertaining goals to ensure access to trusted information (Art. 12), and promote the capacity to decrease, manage and warn about public health risks (Art. 3). The need

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<sup>1</sup> From the research works quoted in this article, see, for instance, Allcott & Gentzkow (2017), Bounegru et al. (2018), Ferreira (2018), Pennycook et al. (2018), Bovet & Makse (2019), Grinberg et al. (2019), Pena (2018, 2019), Prior (2019) or Rodrigues & Machado (2020).

<sup>2</sup> Much research has addressed this issue (Bessi et al. 2015, Allcott, & Gentzkow 2017, Wardle, & Derakhshan 2017, IPR 2019).

<sup>3</sup> For instance, the work by Vosoughi et al. (2018), Bovet, & Makse (2019), and Grinberg et al. (2019) may be referred.

<sup>4</sup> Having a very pertinent role in the Brazilian context (cf. Ferreira 2018, Teixeira 2018 or Rodrigues, & Machado 2020, for contextualisation and debate).

to promote actively these measures was particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic; hence, the European entities have highlighted the importance of counteracting disinformation for several years (see European Commission, 2018 and European Concilium, 2020). In Portugal, different research efforts should especially focus on Facebook and news websites and apps, as respondents have particularly expressed concern with the reliability of the content displayed in these media (in 34.5% and 22% of cases, respectively, see Digital News Report Portugal, 2020).

In Portugal, as of 2018, citizens were faced with an information disorder<sup>5</sup> scenario in which over 40 disinformation outlets were regularly browsed and accessed by more than 2 million followers (vid. Pena, 2018, 2019). Additionally, 48% of internet users admit they did not know how to recognise a false piece of news (European Commission, 2018) Between then and now, figures are likely to have increased. As a direct consequence, Portugal, a country in which trust levels in media were considerably high, fell from second to third place in the worldwide ranking of trust in news (cf. Digital News Report Portugal, 2018, 2020, 2022 and Digital News Report Portugal, 2021, 2019, vs. 2023), and, as of 2023, about 7 in 10 citizens are said to be concerned with what is real and false disseminated online (Digital News Report, 2023).

As a result, in the Portuguese context, fake news has been a topic of research in the fields of Journalism and Communication<sup>6</sup> (Pena 2018, 2019, for instance). Nonetheless, there is still a research gap when considering the issues of proximation (Cap, 2006, 2013, 2022, Kopytowska, 2018, 2022, as highlighted by Nunes, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, fort.) and (im)politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, for a correlation of the two cf. Wieczorek, 2008, Korostenskienė, 2020) employed on (dis)information media.

The ongoing research aims to address this research gap by raising awareness to some fake news discursive markers, with a pragmalinguistic and cognitive cline (cf. Nunes, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, fort., Sousa & Nunes, 2021, 2022). In this article, the focus will be drawn upon first and second-person deictics as proven proximation features (Cap, 2006, 2013, 2022, Kopytowska, 2018, 2022) in the disinformation outlets *Altamente*, *Luso*, *Magazine Lusa* and *VLPT* and potential face-threatening acts (from now onwards, FTAs, according to Brown & Levinson, 1987), in opposition to well-established news media, namely *Diário de Notícias*, *Público*, *Sábado* and *Visão*.

This paper is structured as follows: after a brief literature review regarding proximation and politeness theory in section 2 and a reference to the

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<sup>5</sup> For disambiguation on this term, cf. Wardle & Derakshan (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Some examples of research undertaken within Portuguese context are undertaken in the domains of Automatic detection of fake news, Cognition and Psychology, Education, Law, Legislation, Jurisdiction or Jurisprudence, Library and information science, Information Management and Curatorial Studies, Linguistics and Language studies, Marketing, Commerce and Advertising, Medicine and other Health sciences, Politics, Diplomacy, Public Relations, and International Relations, Public Security and Public Order, Semiotics or Sociology, similarly to what has been done in the English speaking academic context. For a full literature review and list of references see Nunes (forth).

methodological procedures in section 3, an exploratory analysis of results obtained will be presented in section 4; preliminary conclusions will follow in section 5.

## 2 Literature Review

In the following sections the two main theoretical frameworks taken in consideration in this study will be briefly explored, namely Proximation Theory (Cap, 2006, 2013, 2022), under the scope of Media Proximation Approach (Kopytowska, 2018, 2022) and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson 1987), as well as a combination of both (cf. Wiczorek, 2008, Korostenskién, 2020).

### 2.1 Proximation

For a better understanding of the contrastive analysis of terms of address and their proximation strategies, an overview of proximation theories or approaches (Cap, 2006, 2013, 2022, Kopytowska, 2018, 2022) is essential.

Proximation Theory (PT) as a theoretical framework was initially purposed by Cap (2006, 2013, 2022) in 2005, as an interdisciplinary approach which draws from three main research areas, namely Pragmatics, Cognitive Linguistics<sup>7</sup>, Critical Discourse Analysis<sup>8</sup> and Chilton's (2004, 2014) Deictic or Discursive Space Theory (DST), also of interdisciplinary nature.

Chilton (2004, 2014) recognised, in line with Cognitive Linguistics and the Euclidian Geometry, that spatial cognition has a fundamental role in the establishment or reinforcement of construals. This means that the notion of space underlies all human cognition and consequently the construction of what the scholar names discursive or deictic space (DS), mental representations, vaguely resembling the idea of mental spaces according to Fauconnier (1997, cf. Cap's 2006, 2013, 2022, differentiation and criticism on DST regarding mainly the Euclidian geometry approach). In his projection of discursive DS, Chilton (2004, 2014) proposes that human cognition is anchored in three deictic dimensions, represented by temporal, spatial/distance and modal axes. He also claims that thought and communication are articulated in relation to the deictic centre, where all these axes merge.

Thus, DST highly influenced Cap (2006, 2013, 2022) who adds that DS may be used by the hearer/reader to impose a forced construal of proximity between entities in DS. While a person, entity, value, object or event are being represented as proximal or close, the hearer's/reader's notion of distance and proximity may be effectively manipulated to meet the speaker's goal(s). Thus, Cap (2013, p. 12)

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<sup>7</sup> In this field, the influence by Langacker's (1987, 1991) work is evidenced in Cap's (2006, 2013, 2022) PT.

<sup>8</sup> The author adopts a Cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (cf. Hart & Cap's 2014 volume). Some pertaining works in these fields are Cap's (2006, 2013, 2022) and Hart's (2010, 2014) theoretical framework.

proposes the proximation theory to analyse the continuous reduction or “narrowing of the symbolic distance” between the entities in the deictic space (DS).

In other words, the speaker cognitively manipulates the notion of space. Via linguistic and multimodal proximation strategies, he/she can construct, position or impose certain people, entities, realities or objects as close in the mind of the hearer/reader. By attaining this the speaker manages to persuade the hearer/reader to adhere or to identify more straightforwardly with the content conveyed.

As a persuasion mechanism, it is often used as part of what Cap (2006, 2013, 2022) states to be the rhetoric of legitimisation mostly used to justify political preventive or defensive actions. In this sense, it is frequently applied to justify mostly preventive and military actions against the Other, i.e., a member of an outgroup, represented as an invader or threatening entity to the well-being of the ingroup.

The author establishes a division of PT in three main domains, baptised as the Spatial-Temporal-Axiological (STA) Model (Cap, 2006, 2013, 2022). In spatial proximation, to legitimise political measures, linguistic resources are used to build a gradual and invasive approximation of the out-group (positioned Outside the Deictic Centre, ODC from now on) in the territory of the in-group (placed Inside the Deictic Centre, henceforth IDC). Regarding temporal proximation, the concept emphasises the present as the main moment, central in the DC and, regarding political legitimisation, the potential conflict is displayed as imminent, which requires an immediate response and unique preventive measures by the political leader to stop the threat of the outgroup. Lastly, axiological proximation, in general, involves the presentation of the values of the ingroup as central or even superior to the out-group. As a strategy for legitimising political interventions, axiological proximation involves the presentation of conflict, an endangerment or irreconcilability among the IDC beliefs, versus the said dangerous values or actions of the antagonistic outgroup, with ominous repercussions to the ingroup’s well-being, safety, or integrity of the IDC values.

Cap’s PT theory also takes into consideration deictics as larger units, hence, including nouns, adjectives, adverbial and verbal phrases, if they have an indexical, deictic or, if one wishes, referential nature (cf. Cap’s 2006, 2013 and 2022 listings). However, for the purposes of this research, only second-person deictics are addressed.

Slightly different and the main reference for the analysis undertaken in this study is Kopytowska’s (2018, 2022) eclectic perspective of the Media Proximation Approach (MPA). Inspired both by Chilton (2004, 2014) and Cap (2006, 2013, 2022), Kopytowska (2018, 2022) considers proximation as a pragmatic and cognitive strategy of distance reduction. However, her approach draws not only on Cognitive Linguistics, Chilton’s (2004, 2014) DST, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Pragmatics but also from Semiotics, Corpus Linguistics, Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS, in this matter see KhosraviNik, 2018, 2022), in its core, by attempting to create a more holistic framework for the analysis of human language.

To Kopytowska (2018, 2022) all media resort to several multimodal strategies which altogether enhance newsworthiness, a dynamic of content curation

that includes notions such as news values, gatekeeping (White 1950), agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and the social role of journalists as watchdogs (Waisbord, 2000) and, to the proponent of MPA, also of proximation. In this approach, by using proximation, all media may project and contribute to the construction a mediated social reality (cf. notions of objective, constructed/mediated, and subjective social reality as defined by Kopytowska, 2018), in which events, people, values, entities, beliefs or objects are presented as close in a non-necessarily threatening way (cf. the notion of proximation of distant suffering, Kopytowska, 2018, 2022, Kopytowska & Krakowiak, 2020). The compelling construals and constructed social reality that result from the cognitive effects of proximation strategies contribute to persuade the hearers/readers to adhere to or identify more easily with the news content conveyed even if the nature of the occurrences is physically peripheral to the hearer's/reader's DC. Therefore, news pieces become more profitable as they become intrinsically perceived as more relevant, newsworthy and real.

A crucial difference to this approach is that MPA establishes two additional proximation strategies. The author considers spatial, temporal, axiological, emotional, as well as epistemic or proximation strategies. Additional proximation strategies may be considered, like the narrative one, according to Hart (2014) and Molek-Kozakowska (2017) or interpersonal<sup>9</sup> proximation (cf. Nunes, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, fort.).

Regarding epistemic proximation, this notion is directly correlated to the familiarity of the hearer/reader with a given topic. To Kopytowska (2018, 2022), the level of cognitive distance and the understanding of a subject is directly correlated with the previous knowledge one has. Thus, epistemic proximation works by reducing the distance that previously existed between the audience and the event reported, mostly by establishing parallels, explanations, comparisons, among other, in an effort to decrease the audience's cognitive effort.

As an event is cognitively more salient when an (in)direct relationship with reader/viewer's life may be established, the notion of emotional proximation is correlated with the increase of the audience's involvement with a given topic and the capability to trigger emotional reactions in the hearers/readers.

## 2.2 Politeness and FTAs

In digital space, users engage in interactive mediated experiences to meet a human 'compulsion of proximity' (Boden & Molotch, 1994, see MPA by Kopytowska,

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<sup>9</sup> This concept may be coincident with Cap's (2006, 2013, 2022) spatial proximation. However, it involves the notions of peripersonal space, social deixis, politeness or informality. Shortly, it comprises the proximation work taken in order to decrease the distance amongst people (namely, the hearer and speaker), with respect to societal norms and hierarchies, ultimately expecting that, cognitively, they are positioned in the DC as equals, establishing a cordial and somewhat informal relationship (or even mimicking a friendship dynamic), without reinforcing a FTA potential to their negative and positive faces. On this matter, see also the analysis undertaken in section 4 of this paper.

2018, 2022), while being expected to follow a certain ‘netiquette’ (term coined by Shea, 1994).

As online etiquette or netiquette is a type of politeness, adapted to the specificities of the internet as a medium, it could further be analysed under the scope of notions such as first-order and second-order politeness. The former is related to “commonsense notions of politeness” (see Terkourafi, 2012, p. 618), i.e., the diverse ways in which polite behaviours are expected, perceived and discussed by ingroup members (IDC to Cap, 2006, 2013, 2022) or different sociocultural groups.

However, online interactions may be analysed under the scope of second-order politeness, that is, a “theoretical construct, a term within a theory of social behaviour and language usage” (Watts et al. 2005, p. 3 cited in Terkourafi 2012, p. 618).

Considering Brown and Levinson’s theoretical framework (1987), which is mainly grounded in pragmatic principles<sup>10</sup>, politeness theory is the other main linguistic foundation of this study. To put it simply, the scholars have defended that communication always implies risks due to its two-sided nature, as one can either be aggressive/rude or be offended, in an overt, covert or even unintended manner. Hence, the researchers believed that speakers and hearers tend to be polite to minimise and mitigate potential risks and conflicts that could arise from communication.

The notion of face assumes a central role in the politeness theoretical framework. The term was first conceptualised by the sociologist Goffman (1967:5) who defended that speakers do a so-called “face-work”, which comprises different rituals that happen (and are expected to take place) during a communicative interaction so as to avoid conflict(s) and damage the positive and the negative faces of the hearer and speaker (for a debate on this notion see Goffman, 1967, Brown and Levinson, 1987 and Terkourafi, 2012).

On the one hand, the positive face is mostly associated with self-esteem, self-image, personality, identity and, consequently, the social acceptance, recognition, sense of belonging and respect one is expected to receive.

On the other hand, the negative face is primarily concerned with respect for one’s autonomy, independence, free will, freedom to act, territorial claims or personal space. Thus, one should expect not to be distracted, forced to act against his/her/their free will or have his/her/their personal spaces breached.

Borrowing from these concepts, Brown and Levinson (1987) considered face and face-work to be universal phenomena to all communication and all human societies and began to apply their theoretical framework to different languages. The authors also state that politeness principles may be broken and not (necessarily) pose a risk to the face, namely in the case of a cooperation emergency or depending on the degree of familiarity, informality and emotional involvement among speakers.

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<sup>10</sup> Similarly to researchers such as Searle (1975), Grice (1975) or Brown and Levinson (1987) recognize that interpersonal relations and language(s) are socially and culturally conditioned and as such, speakers and hearers try to abide by those principles, rituals or rules.

Bearing in mind the direct correlation of the terms of address herein analysed and positive politeness, politeness studies have highlighted that in some languages there is the dichotomy of *tu-vous* (see Brown & Levinson, 1987) which impose different societal dynamics and expectations. As such, if relationships between the hearer and speaker are not symmetrical, to maintain the face, one should use the right terms of address and formal honorifics which vary depending on the context of interaction and social roles of the hearer and speaker.

Regarding the two different theoretical frameworks in which this article is based upon, only the studies carried out by Wieczorek (2008) and Korostenskiene (2020) articulate FTA, politeness and proximation.

First, Wieczorek (2008) addresses several discursive strategies: namely proximation, legitimisation, assertions, and common ground in speeches by, for instance, a former Spanish prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, regarding the approval of adoption and marriage between individuals of the same sex in 2005.

In his political discourse, Wieczorek (2008:31) mainly addresses axiological proximation considering “legitimation” to be “an example of Brown and Levinson’s positive politeness strategies (1987)”. In line with Cap (2006), to whom legitimisation is established as the main objective of the political speaker, who seeks to justify and obtain support for the actions he intends to execute or that already have been executed, Wieczorek (2008, p.31) concludes that legitimisation “provides reasons for undertaking certain past, present, or future actions, which in turn mitigates potential Face Threatening Acts”.

Korostenskiene (2020) also analyses politeness, but her study aligns more with the theoretical framework and object of study in this paper. She addresses politeness strategies in terms of address and patronymics added to one’s surname, undertaking a sociolinguistic questionnaire applied to Russian ethnic minorities inserted in several professional contexts in Lithuania, concluding that its use today would be perceived as something that inflicts discomfort and, consequently, consciously avoided as an FTA. In what this research is concerned, Korostenskiene (2020) states “ATs [address terms] acknowledge the relation holding between the addresser and the addressee at the former’s initiative”, “performing the strategic function of representation (Chilton, 2004)”, further clarifying that terms of address “represent the reality of the speaker toward the addressee while their choice stipulates how this reality will be represented” (Korostenskiene, 2020, p.107).

In other words, terms of address may constitute an effective construal, reinforcing proximation (Cap, 2006, 2013, 2022, Kopytowska, 2018, 2022) or distanciation strategies (Chovanec, 2019) in line with (im)polite goals, as will be further analysed in section 4.

### 3 Methodology

As this paper is part of an ongoing research project, the research selection criteria are in line with Nunes (2022 2023a-b, fort.), or Sousa and Nunes (2021, 2022),

compromising health, science and well-being discourse domains along with websites with the highest number of followers or subscription rates.

For these purposes, eight Portuguese corpora of online news websites (particularly, *Diário de Notícias*, *Público*, *Sábado* and *Visão*) and websites labelled as fake news producers (namely *Altamente*, *Lusojornal2015/Lusoamanhecer* (from now on referred to as *Luso*), *Magazine Lusa*, and *Vamos Lá Portugal* (henceforward, *VLPT*), according to *Diário de Notícias*' research undertaken by the journalist Paulo Pena (2018, 2019) were compiled and attained for 2015-2020 (cf. Table 1).

Table 1. Corpora description: *Diário de Notícias*, *Público*, *Sábado*, *Visão*, *Altamente*, *Luso*, *Magazine Lusa* and *VLPT*

Online newspaper	Year	News	Tokens	Types	Type/token ratio (TTR)
<i>Diário de Notícias</i>	2015	138	75 139	11 394	0.152
	2016	614	382 396	31 414	0.082
	2017	671	452 327	32 727	0.072
	2018	653	491 758	35 681	0.073
	2019	863	751 328	47 014	0.063
	2020	1395	1 394 304	63 932	0.046
	Total	4333	3 547 252	118 652	0.033
<i>Público</i>	2015	259	293 757	26 063	0.089
	2016	304	328 532	27 180	0.083
	2017	535	518 213	36 988	0.071
	2018	561	527 111	37 676	0.071
	2019	663	622 267	39 325	0.063
	2020	1688	1 720 571	68 327	0.040
	Total	4010	4 010 451	118 399	0.030
<i>Sábado</i>	2015	104	45 816	9 459	0.206
	2016	165	83 410	13 745	0.165
	2017	316	187 276	22 967	0.123
	2018	454	307 296	29 517	0.096
	2019	469	330 577	30 381	0.092
	2020	1 057	633 945	39 877	0.063
	Total	2 565	1 588 320	78 984	0.050
<i>Visão</i>	2015	139	87 884	14 053	0.160
	2016	340	275 761	27 905	0.101
	2017	405	287 633	28 493	0.099
	2018	513	352 150	31 912	0.091
	2019	649	415 279	36 278	0.087
	2020	1 629	1 098 700	61 669	0.056
	Total	3 675	2 517 407	103 967	0.041
Fake news website	Year	Publications	Tokens	Types	Type/token ratio (TTR)
<i>Altamente</i>	2015	490	234 064	18 740	0.080

	2016	234	114 240	12 655	0.111
	2017	160	83 029	11 509	0.139
	2018	81	34 965	6 391	0.183
	2019	74	25 930	5 407	0.209
	2020	11	2 123	931	0.439
	Total	1 050	494 351	30 765	0.062
<i>Luso</i>	2015	82	36 080	6 172	0.171
	2016	291	148 691	13 995	0.094
	2017	164	92 464	13 191	0.143
	2018	82	40 733	8 312	0.204
	2019	13	7 610	2 483	0.326
	2020	206	106 837	13 647	0.128
	Total	838	432 415	30 949	0.072
<i>Magazine Lusa</i>	2016 <sup>11</sup>	178	67 505	9 237	0.137
	2017	414	171 720	16 329	0.095
	2018	1	129	91	0.705
	2019	11	5 086	1 885	0.371
	2020	4	700	378	0.540
	N/A	5	1 587	623	0.393
	Total	613	246 727	20 158	0.082
<i>VLPT</i>	2015	134	48 661	7 141	0.147
	2016	160	64 433	8 965	0.139
	2017	119	42 205	7 546	0.179
	2018	37	12 905	3 420	0.265
	2019	42	18 182	4 209	0.231
	2020	81	24 084	4 765	0.198
	N/A	378	151 926	16 812	0.111
Total	951	362 396	27 098	0.075	

After the corpora were manually extracted, Corpus Linguistics methodological procedures were adopted, as the WordSmith Tools (Scott, 2019) and #LancsBox (Brezina et al., 2020) concordancers were used to extract frequency and cluster lists, as well as concordance lines and other pertaining data considered relevant (such as GraphColl images). Statistically, log-likelihood and Mann-Whitney tests were undertaken to attest the validity of the hypothesis that the use of personal deictics is more frequent and statistically significant on websites considered to be fake news producers than in newspapers and online magazines under study.

Subsequently, an analysis of terms of address used in the news and disinformation set of corpora, addressing their proximation (Kopytowska, 2018, 2022) and face-threatening potential (Brown & Levinson, 1987) was performed.

<sup>11</sup> There were no publications in 2015 on this website.

## 4 Research Findings and Discussion

As Portuguese is a language in which the system *tu-vous* is used, politeness must be addressed alongside the social and linguistic implications of formal and informal discursive markers.

Hence, as Portuguese is a null-subject language, a complete analysis of terms of address has to entail not only personal pronouns but also verb forms and inflections. The scrutiny of personal pronouns pointed to a clear preference given to *você* (→ ‘you’) as the main term of address in fake news outlets in the corpora under study (Table 2), disclosing a very residual use in the news corpora group ( $LL=8898.28$ ,  $BF=8881.88$ ,  $LogR=-6.71$ ;  $U=0$ ,  $p=0.029$ ,  $r=-0.774$ ).

Another recurrent term of address occurring almost exclusively in disinformation corpora is *tu* (→ ‘you’) ( $LL=160.48$ ,  $BF=144.08$ ,  $LogR=-2.46$ ;  $U=0$ ,  $p=0.029$ ,  $r=-0.774$ ). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, leading to the conclusion that the frequency is significantly different across the set of fake news when compared against the news websites.

Table 2. Occurrence of the personal pronouns *tu* (→ ‘you’) and *você* (→ ‘you’) in *Diário de Notícias*, *Público*, *Sábado*, *Visão*, *Altamente*, *Luso*, *Magazine Lusa* and *VLPT* corpora

Corpus	<i>Tu</i> (→ ‘you’)		<i>Você</i> (→ ‘you’)	
	Abs. Freq.	Rel. Freq. (1M) <sup>12</sup>	Abs. Freq.	Rel. (1M)
<i>Diário de Notícias</i>	42	12	63	18
<i>Público</i>	36	9	38	9
<i>Sábado</i>	32	20	24	15
<i>Visão</i>	50	20	45	18
<i>Altamente</i>	48	97	421	852
<i>Luso</i>	22	51	559	1293
<i>Magazine Lusa</i>	18	73	346	1401
<i>VLPT</i>	27	75	1022	2820

In theory, the use of these terms of address simultaneously activates what Cap (2006, 2013, 2022) refers to as spatial proximity strategies, in addition to being an imposition of axiological proximity, which could lead to an FTA, as a potential violation of a pre-delimited social or cultural values and ideologies of hierarchy.

However, it is considered that the use of personal pronouns like *eu* (→ ‘I’), *nós* (→ ‘we’), *tu* (→ ‘you’), *você* (→ ‘you’) and *vocês* (→ ‘you’) contribute to what Nunes (2020 2021, 2022 2023a-b, fort.) labelled as personal or interpersonal proximation. This type of forced proximation draws, of course, on the construal of proximity (either cognitive, social or physical) of the hearer and speaker as close entities. Despite being undertaken on a cognitive level via the use of construals, it could lead to FTAs as a direct consequence. To mitigate the potential impoliteness and threat to the positive face, other proximation strategies are used to mitigate the menace potential. Emotional proximation may be one of the most pertaining ones, specially via the use of the testimonial function (Maingueneau, 2004, cf. examples 1 and 4), conveyed by indirect and direct speech or quotation.

<sup>12</sup> Henceforth all relative frequencies presented are normalised per million words.

Due to the potential threatening effect, news websites barely use the personal pronoun *você* (→ ‘you’), as an informal term of address, to avoid being impolite or threatening to the hearer’s/reader’s face, at least among European Portuguese readers (cf. Table 1). On the one hand, in European Portuguese<sup>13</sup>, *você* (→ ‘you’) would not be equivalent to the politest term of address. In fact, historically, the pronominal form *você* (→ ‘you’) was used by members of higher hierarchical classes to address those from lower societal classes (see, inter alia, Pina, 2004, Duarte, 2010, 2011, Raposo et al., 2013, Duarte & Lopes, 2014, Lopes, 2018). To this day, in some Portuguese-speaking regions, it may be considered potentially presumptuous, incurring in disdain, therefore, its use may be perceived as FTA. However, for many European Portuguese speakers it is a semi-formal term of address, i.e. more formal than *tu* (→ ‘you’) but not as formal as *senhor* or *senhora* (Mr/Sir, Mrs/Ms/Madam).

On the other hand, in Brazilian Portuguese (BP), *você* (→ ‘you’) is the dominant and preferred informal term of address, not being associated with the hierarchical FTA potential of its European Portuguese (EP) equivalent. In this sense, in BP *você* (→ ‘you’) is often used in a much similar fashion to *tu* (→ ‘you’) in EP.

Nonetheless, disinformation outlets use *você* (→ ‘you’) as a term of address to cover health, science and well-being topics presented informally, as if an informal conversation was unfolding, likely to be observed in the colloquial tone in example 1.

1. *E vocês sabiam que quase todo o salmão vendido em Portugal vem do Chile?! Quer dizer... você começa a consumir com frequência o salmão, querendo fazer bem a sua saúde, e sem saber vai acabar desenvolvendo problemas de saúde que você não tinha. Eu passo muito, muito longe de salmão e de qualquer peixe criado em cativeiro (VLPT, 11/3/2015, <https://www.vamoslaportugal.com/noticias/a-farsa-do-salmão-somos-enganados-todos-devem-ver-isto>).*

‘And did **you** all know that almost all salmon sold in Portugal come from Chile?! I mean... **you start** consuming salmon frequently, wanting to improve **your** health, and without knowing it **you will end up** developing health problems that **you didn’t have**. **I stay** very, very far away from salmon and any farmed fish’ (translated by the author).

In the aforesaid example 1, the sudden pronominal shift from the plural term of address *vocês* (→ ‘you’) to a singular and individualised term of address like *você* (→ ‘you’) finally gives place to the authorial voice of the speaker who intentionally chooses to use the first person pronoun *eu* (→ ‘I’) which could easily be suppressed in the Portuguese language. This further contributes to narrative proximation effects (Hart, 2014, Molek-Kozakowska, 2017). Furthermore, and despite the

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<sup>13</sup> The target audience of the fake news outlets is Portuguese, as could be seen in the news publication preference and even the name of the websites which display Lusitanian or Portuguese references, namely *Luso*, *VLPT* and *Magazine Lusa* (cf. also Pena 2018, 2019). However, as is briefly discussed in this paper, most articles adopt the Brazilian Portuguese variety, possibly due to automatic translations, or plagiarism.

mitigating strategies mentioned thus far, the hearer is assumed to consider the utterance an FTA; yet, the speaker undertakes another interpersonal proximation strategy (to Cap, 2006, 2013, 2022 spatial proximation), this time focussed on the speaker who directly presents his/her perspective/opinion by undertaking testimonial function as referred to by Maingueneau (2004).

Spatial proximation is also particularly evident in the lexico-grammatical expression “*em Portugal*” (see example 1). In this study, this notion is taken to derive from the notion of a shared space between the speaker and the hearer/reader, in which case it is a space with an exophoric<sup>14</sup> character.

However, as Nunes (forth.) noticed, this space may be virtual (and often is) due to the nature of social media and websites as virtual spaces (as exemplified in *aqui* → ‘here’ in excerpt 2). This may further consist of a specific subtype of proximation which may be called endophoric<sup>15</sup> spatial proximation, because online discursive spaces have a proper structure which does not mirror a physical space organisation, rather relying on a hyperlink structure and intertextuality (see Kopytowska, 2022, or Kopytowska and Krakowiak, 2020, for a debate on this matter).

2. *Aqui estão os principais alarmes que podem salvar vidas: // • Rigidez do ombro e do pescoço (...) se se sentir preso e não puder tocar no peito com o queixo, deve consultar o seu médico* (Altamente 2019<sup>16</sup>, <https://www.altamente.org/avc-5-alarmes-que-podem-salvar-uma-vida/>).

‘Here are the main warning signs that can save lives: // • Stiffness of the shoulder and neck (...) if **you feel trapped** and **cannot touch your chest** with your chin, you **should consult your** doctor’ (translated by the author).

Some researchers claim these are digital rhetorical spaces (Sousa & Ivanova, 2012); or for some others they are yet another form of mental spaces (Fauconnier, 1997) or text worlds (Werth 1999, Gavins 2007). For the purposes of this research, they will be considered as DS (Chilton, 2004, 2014, Cap, 2006, 2013, 2022, Kopytowska 2018, 2022) which have a different organisation, marked by endophoric and deictic references, along with a hyperlink intertextuality, reflecting the website design (for a debate regarding this topic, for instance, cf. Hill 2006, Tagg 2015, Kopytowska & Krakowiak, 2020, Kopytowska, 2022, Zhang, 2022). Although the main DC tends to be the website in itself, the most evident factor of its specificity is that due to internet’s hyperlink nature, the deictic centres may rapidly shift and the reader/hearer can be redirected to other virtual domains on the internet as a cyberspace, which then occupy the central role in the deictic reference (for further discussion of results see Nunes, fort.).

It should be mentioned that as a null-subject language, disinformation outlets could simply avoid the pronoun *você* (→ ‘you’), by solely making use of the verb

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<sup>14</sup> The use of this term derives directly from the postulates by Halliday and Hasan (1976), Maillard (1974), and Almeida (2000).

<sup>15</sup> Idem.

<sup>16</sup> This website does not provide a precise date of publication in any of its published articles.

form (as illustrated in excerpt 2) and letting the hearer/reader imply the term of address they prefer, because the verb forms on their own could also coincide with formal terms of address such as *senhor* or *senhora* (Mr/Sir, Mrs/Ms/Madam).

Thus, the explicit use of *você* (→ ‘you’) seems to be a conscious choice that has no intent to jeopardize the social status, self-perception or self-esteem of the hearer/reader (i.e., positive face), or be perceived as invading one’s intimate personal (or peripersonal, according to Chilton, 2004, 2014) space. Informality, then, aligns with epistemic proximation purposes (Kopytowska, 2018, 2022), intending to explain topics to which the hearer/reader may be estranged with in a rather personal and informal manner. This also mitigates the face-threatening potential conveyed by the imperative verb forms (e.g., the modal auxiliary “*deve*” in excerpt 2), also commonly used to provide the hearer/reader with instructions and advice (in this case, being the FTA further mitigated by the hypothetical scenario).

Before proceeding to a further analysis of the second-person singular pronoun form *tu* (→ ‘you’), all its respective second-person deictics should be briefly pointed out (cf. Table 3). In fact, all second-person pronouns, possessive pronouns, determiners and second-person verb forms<sup>17</sup> display even a higher statistical difference in favour of fake news outlets ( $LL=29034.70$ ,  $BF=29018.30$ ,  $LogR=-4.87$ ;  $U=0$ ,  $p=0.029$ ,  $r=-0.744$ ).

Table 3. Occurrence of second person deictics (personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, determiners and second-person verb forms) in *Diário de Notícias*, *Público*, *Sábado*, *Visão*, *Altamente*, *Luso*, *Magazine Lusa* and *VLPT* corpora

Corpus	Abs. Freq.	Rel. Freq (1M)
<i>Diário de Notícias</i>	573	162
<i>Público</i>	469	117
<i>Sábado</i>	631	397
<i>Visão</i>	768	305
<i>Altamente</i>	3684	7452
<i>Luso</i>	1042	2410
<i>Magazine Lusa</i>	2906	11770
<i>VLPT</i>	1779	4909

This term of address *tu* (→ ‘you’) is especially frequent in the corpora *Altamente* and *Magazine Lusa* (cf. excerpt 3), and a clear difference may be inferred between these corpora and *VLPT* in which *você* is established as a preferential term of address.

3. *Duas Estrelas vão Colidir e tu Vais Conseguir Ver tudo Sem um Telescópio!*  
 // *Será talvez a primeira e única vez que conseguiremos ver isto (...) Vamos aguardar, parece prometedor! // Diz-nos se gostaste! A tua opinião ajuda-nos a melhorar!* (*Magazine Lusa*, 24/1/2017, <http://www.magazinelusa.com/duas-estrelas-vaao-colidir-e-tu-vais-conseguir-ver-tudo-sem-um-telescopio>)

<sup>17</sup> Here, apart from the subject personal pronoun *tu*, other object personal pronouns (namely *te*, *ti*, and *contigo*), possessive pronouns or determiners (*teu*, *tua*, *teus* and *tuas*), as well as all second-person verb forms are included.

“Two Stars Will Collide and **You** Will Be Able to See Everything Without a Telescope! // It will perhaps be the first and only time that **we** will be able to see this (...) **Let’s** wait, it looks promising! // Tell **us** if **you** liked it! **Your** opinion helps **us** improve!”

As the example exposes, *Magazine Lusa* uses second-person deictics transversally through the publications, even if there is some deictic shift. In excerpt 3 above, although the second person is used from the title to the last paragraph, other interpersonal proximation strategies occur such as like interpersonal inclusive proximation (see the inclusive use of the personal *nós* (→ ‘we’<sup>18</sup>), including both the hearer/reader and speaker in “consequiremos ver isto” (→ we will be able to see this). Nonetheless, in this corpus, apart from epistemic proximation, one of the primary proximation strategies is the allocutive<sup>19</sup> proximation, with a direct address to the hearer, assuming the perlocutionary effect of engagement (via sharing, commenting or reading more articles).

4. “Quando **tu** aos nove anos **descobres** que a **tua** mãe está tramada, aos 12 **deixas** de fazer o que mais **gostas** na vida que é andar de bicicleta, **virus-te** para os jogos de video e aos 14 ou 15 **ficas** com a mão direita escavacada e **deixas** de poder jogar, o que **vais** fazer?”, pergunta (*Público*, 31/7/2017, <https://www.publico.pt/2017/07/31/sociedade/noticia/um-tipo-todo-torto-continua-a-insistir-em-ter-uma-vida-normal-1779919>).

“When at 9 years old **you** find out that **your** mother is in serious trouble, at 12 **you** stop doing what **you** love most in life, which is riding a bike, **you** turn to video games and at 14 or 15 **your** right hand gets wrecked and **you** can no longer play, what are **you** going to do?” he asks.’ (translated by the author).

In most cases of interpersonal proximation, either conveyed by the second-pronouns *tu* (→ ‘you’) or *você* (→ ‘you’), as selected terms of address, emotional proximation as a perlocutionary effect is also expected to occur considering the topics addressed, deictic shifts and testimonies (especially illustrated in excerpt 4). More than often the effects of emotional proximation include i) a sense of belonging to the ingroup (mainly via the use of inclusive *nós* (→ ‘we’) and axiological proximation); ii) compassion with distant suffering of others; or iii) fear and anxiety caused by the actions or statements provided by others and, consequently, the urge to act, either by commenting or sharing the publications.

As seen in excerpt 4, this strategy is also common to news websites, even if the allocutive proximation strategies are scarcer on the whole. Via quotation, João,

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<sup>18</sup> Another use which imposes distance is the exclusive “we”, addressed by Chilton (2004, 2014), Cap (2006, 2013, 2022), Kopytowska (2018, 2022) or Nunes (2020 2021, 2022 2023a-b, fort.), for instance.

<sup>19</sup> The name derives from the French term *allocutaire*, roughly equivalent to the pragmatic concept of hearer (cf. Ducrot 1984, Charaudeau & Maingueneau 2002, SIL 2024, *French/English Glossary of Linguistic Terms*). As this concept was introduced in Portuguese via the French etymology, the term *proximização interpessoal alocutiva* (→ ‘interpersonal allocutive proximation’) was proposed by Nunes (fort.).

carrier of a rare condition, asks a rhetorical question not only to reinforce epistemic proximation, but also to promote emotional and interpersonal proximation. The hearer/reader is prompted to reflect upon their life should they share the same condition described about the patient, by reporting the adversities, feeling closer to this patient and compelled to share and interact with this life story. Instances like this reinforce the importance of further studies regarding the power of narratives in news media and disinformation (Bessi et al., 2015).

## 5 Conclusions

The corpora under study confirmed the hypothesis that the use and repetition of second-person singular deictic items conveying interpersonal, emotional, narrative, spatial or narrative proximation occur more frequently on fake news websites than on online newspapers and magazines websites (Cap, 2006, 2013, 2022 and Kopytowska, 2018, 2022). These proximation strategies contribute to increase the individuals' cognitive processing of information perceived as more relevant, salient and, consequently, closer to speakers and hearers/readers, thereby triggering deeper emotional/personal, temporal and spatial involvement of the hearer/reader (Kopytowska, 2018, 2022) and building on trust and credibility towards the pieces of news.

In this case study, the most frequent terms of address in disinformation outlets were confirmed to be *tu* (→ 'you', being preferred in corpora such as *Altamente* and *Magazine Lusa*) and *você* (→ 'you', particularly frequent in *VLPT*), informal and semi-formal choices that could impose FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987) had these pronouns not been used along the aforementioned proximation strategies and testimonial function (Maingueneau 2004).

During the ongoing study, research outcomes indicate that interpersonal allocutive proximation is predominant in disinformation corpora; in addition, epistemic, emotional, narrative and interpersonal proximation strategies are also shown in news media websites, along with the testimonial function (Maingueneau, 2004).

Thus, further studies should address research gaps not taken into account here, for instance, i) undertaking an analysis of potential FTA evidenced in other discursive markers like the use of imperative utterances, as well as illocutionary and perlocutionary acts (Searle, 1975), ii) listing all verb forms associated to the personal pronoun *você* (→ 'you', which is more difficult to obtain via automatic tagging as this pronominal form resorts to third-person verb forms, despite its semantic nature as a second-person pronominal form, cf. Raposo et al., 2013).

In a broader context, research will have to continue to address not only proximation strategies, but also fake news' discursive markers, multimodal features, the use of testimonies and narratives, in contrast with online news outlets intended to improve awareness, critical thinking and automatic detection.

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