

UN/RATIFIED IMPOLITENESS. WAYS OF BEING IMPOLITE IN THE PORTUGUESE PARLIAMENT

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Abstract

This paper examines the manifestations of impoliteness in debates within the Portuguese Parliament, with particular attention to both verbal and non-verbal impolite acts. We conceptualise this integration of verbal (linguistic) and non-verbal (im)politeness within the broader multimodal discursive context as *discursive (im)politeness*. The analysis adopts an interactional perspective, conceptualising impoliteness as a phenomenon that may be either ratified or unratified by addressees during verbal interaction. At the macro level, impoliteness is treated as a parameter of genre, anticipated and regulated both by the parliamentary rules of procedure and by the informal conventions of parliamentary tradition. At the micro level, within each interaction, impoliteness emerges as both a potential strategic choice of the speaker and an interpretative judgment by the addressees, who may or may not ratify the impolite act. The analysis shows that verbal impoliteness is the most frequent; however, nonverbal impoliteness appears to challenge the traditional boundaries of Portuguese parliamentary tolerance more markedly than verbal impoliteness. In the parliamentary debates analysed, impoliteness is primarily instrumental, functioning as an argumentative strategy that the adversary may also strategically ignore. Therefore, specific acts of impoliteness must be analysed in relation to how ongoing interactions are managed, as well as to the Parliament's capacity to establish itself as a forum for debate. For the purposes of this study, we examine political debates transcribed in the official records of the Portuguese Parliament (*Diário da Assembleia da República*), covering the country's current democratic period.

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1 Introduction

This paper focuses on parliamentary debates, in which impoliteness is often fostered by interpersonal relationships marked by dissent. Dissent constitutes an essential element of parliamentary politics, which is fundamentally a struggle for power (Marques, 2000, 2008). Within this context, impoliteness emerges as an inherent feature of this discursive genre, commonly regarded as "face-threatening"

(Ayala, 2001; Marques, 2000, 2008), and serves to signal aggressive interpersonal dynamics.

By adopting an adversarial stance, MPs and government members legitimise the establishment of an agonal interpersonal relationship in which impoliteness occurs. At this macro level, impoliteness is always regulated by the institutional framework in which it takes place. However, this does not imply that such practices cannot be contested simply because they are expected.

Impoliteness is a widespread communicative phenomenon, and antagonistic relationships exhibiting similar confrontational patterns can be found in verbal interactions across diverse discourse genres beyond political debate. For instance, in courtroom interactions, Lakoff (1989, p. 101) observes that “non-polite behaviour can be systematic and normal,” underscoring the importance of examining the relationship between power and impoliteness in such contexts.

This study investigates the regulation of impoliteness in Portuguese parliamentary debates, with particular attention to its manifestations and discursive functions. In a communicative genre where impoliteness is not only recurrent but also, to some extent, expected, it becomes essential to analyse the potential consequences of these speech acts. Such an approach enables a more comprehensive characterisation of these practices and highlights their distinctive features, which are inextricably linked to the parliamentary debate genre.

Grounded in the theoretical framework of impoliteness studies (Blas Arroyo, 2001; Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 2011a, 2011b; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2010) and linguistic discourse analysis (Adam, 2011; Maingueneau, 2014; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005, among others), this research analyses both verbal and non-verbal forms of impoliteness within the same institutional setting. Particular emphasis is placed on assessing their role in shaping interactional dynamics throughout parliamentary debate.

2 Theoretical and Methodological Issues

Although the definitions of politeness and impoliteness—and the boundaries between them—remain contested, impoliteness has assumed a central role in the study and development of linguistic politeness theory. First, there is no single, universally accepted definition of politeness. Since Brown and Levinson’s seminal work (1987), attempts to conceptualise and categorise this discursive phenomenon have multiplied. Culpeper and Tantucci (2021) identify three phases in politeness research – indeed, three complementary strands -ranging from Brown and Levinson’s utterance-level account of facework, to a second phase emphasising the contextual dependence of politeness, and finally, to an interactional perspective on its construction. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004, p. 45) integrates these strands, defining politeness as “... a set of strategies for protecting and enhancing the images of others to preserve ‘the order of interaction’”. We further assume that verbal

politeness constitutes a sociocultural and linguistic process whose characteristics vary according to discourse genre.

Second, delimiting the boundaries between politeness and impoliteness is equally complex, given that the evaluation of an act as polite or impolite is context-dependent and both concepts operate along a gradient. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2010) thus argues that a theory of politeness must necessarily encompass impoliteness: “The concept of impoliteness is meaningful only in relation to the concept of politeness, and vice versa”.

Although impoliteness is a necessary (though not symmetrical) component of politeness theory, its research tradition is comparatively recent (Culpeper & Hardaker, 2017). Nonetheless, the field has already produced a substantial body of publications and scholarly debates, with contributions from, among others, Locker and Bousfield (2003), Bousfield (2008), Culpeper (2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2017, 2019), Culpeper and Hardaker (2017), Fuentes and Alcaide (2008), and Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1997, 2004). In their reflection on impoliteness, Culpeper and Hardaker (2017, p. 200) stress that it is context-dependent and entails a negative emotional process. More recent research on discursive emotions has introduced new perspectives into the field (Plantin, 2011; Marques, 2012).

2.1 Portuguese parliamentary debates: data and objectives of analysis

Although previous studies have addressed impoliteness in Portuguese parliamentary debates, their scope has been restricted to verbal manifestations of impoliteness (Marques, 2009, 2014). Given the nature of this genre and the socio-discursive status of its participants - political opponents representing the Portuguese people in their ideological and partisan diversity -instances of impolite behaviour, including verbal aggressiveness, are to be expected (Fuentes & Alcaide, 2008). Importantly, however, such attacks take place between political adversaries rather than enemies.

Portuguese parliamentary debates are regulated by explicit, albeit imprecise, provisions contained in the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of the Republic, the official designation of the Portuguese parliament, namely Articles 84, 85, and Article 89 (3), as well as by the Code of Conduct for its members. In addition, these debates are shaped by implicit norms rooted in parliamentary tradition, which contribute to the distinctive discursive style of this institutional setting. Within their self-regulated interactional obligations, participants are required to observe a duty of urbanity (Article 5 of the Members of Parliament’s Code of Conduct), understood both as a commitment to institutional dignity and responsibility, and as a political imperative to safeguard one’s own and others’ face.

From this institutional perspective, impoliteness is primarily directed at the role performed by opponents or by the groups they represent. Consequently, euphemistic strategies are generally preferred over direct personal targeting, since the latter would constitute an *ad personam* attack (Marques, 2008; Marques, Duarte & Seara, 2019).

Nevertheless, the analysis of impolite exchanges in parliamentary confrontations reveals the complex discursive organisation underlying interpersonal relationships. We therefore argue that the various forms of impoliteness observed in Portuguese parliamentary debates stem from the characteristics of the discursive genre (Marques, 2012; Marques & Duarte, 2024). These manifestations are shaped by the participants' social, political, and discursive roles, by the contexts in which impoliteness arises, and by the modality of the act, whether verbal or non-verbal. Moreover, familiarity with the communication contract (Charaudeau, 2011, pp. 49-55) may attenuate the perceived aggressiveness of such acts.

This study examines how verbal and non-verbal impoliteness are constructed and how they affect participants' interpersonal relationships. With respect to non-verbal impoliteness, we analyse the use of impolite communicative gestures and their impact on the interactional dynamics of Portuguese parliamentary debates. More specifically, we investigate the extent to which these gestures are anticipated and accepted by participants in the interaction.

Considering the structure of parliamentary debates, two discursive units were selected for analysis: *interventions* and *asides*. Interventions, delivered by Members of Parliament or government representatives upon formally taking the floor, are subject to strict time limits and procedural rules regulating parliamentary speech. In contrast, asides, defined in parliamentary procedure as “voices of agreement, disagreement, or similar”, are not classified as interruptions. Occurring at the margins of the debate, asides are exempt from the interventions' formal constraints. This relative freedom provides speakers with greater latitude for both verbal and non-verbal expression, thereby granting asides a distinct discursive status. An illustration of this can be seen in the intervention of the President of the Portuguese Parliament in the following excerpt:

(1) *Aplausos do CDS-PP e do PSD.*

Vozes do PCP: — Mentiroso!

A Sr.^a Presidente: — Srs. Deputados, pedia-lhes um pouco mais de contenção no debate, sobretudo nos extradebate. (DAR, 13 de fevereiro de 2013)

‘Applause from CDS-PP and PSD.

Voices from the PCP: — Liar!

The President: — Honorable Members, I must ask you to exercise greater restraint in the debate, particularly in the extra-debate.’

The corpus analysed was randomly selected from the *Diário da Assembleia da República* (DAR), the official record of parliamentary plenary sessions. It comprises both verbal and non-verbal impolite acts observed in debates held under the current Portuguese democratic regime. The starting point for this selection was the session of April 9 2009, which was marked by intense confrontation and by the recurrence of verbal and non-verbal aggressiveness. This debate occurred during a

politically and socially critical juncture, shortly before Portugal requested financial assistance from the European Union.

2.2 Verbal and non-verbal impoliteness in parliamentary debates

Within the implicit framework of harmonious and cooperative interaction that typically characterises verbal exchanges and justifies the centrality of politeness theory, acts of impoliteness are generally unexpected. Nevertheless, research has long acknowledged the heterogeneous pragmatic and discursive functions that impoliteness can fulfil. Culpeper et al. (2003, p. 1545) emphasise that “[c]onflictive talk has been found to play a role, and often a central one” as is the case with political discourse, which forms part of political struggle. In several political discourse genres, such as parliamentary debates, impoliteness functions as part of a power game involving attempts to persuade audiences, often considered a key component of the process (Marques, 2008).

The confrontational nature of parliamentary debates, which frequently involve face-threatening acts, requires a nuanced approach to impoliteness as an unexpected behaviour within a given socio-discursive context. Indeed, impoliteness as a derogation of expectations does not fully align with the conventional parameters of the parliamentary debate genre, which anticipates impoliteness as a discursive resource, albeit one contingent upon the speaker’s choice.

Considering (im)politeness as a dimension of discourse construction entails recognising that discourses are multimodal—that is, both multichannel and plurisemiotic. While linguistic (im)politeness primarily addresses the verbal level, a multimodal discursive perspective allows for the analysis of both verbal and non-verbal manifestations of politeness and impoliteness. We conceptualise this integration of verbal (linguistic) and non-verbal (im)politeness within the broader multimodal discursive context as *discursive (im)politeness*.

We analyse non-verbal impoliteness within the pragmatic category of communicative gestures. These gestures are defined as non-verbal actions forming an integral part of spoken interaction, in other words, mimetic-gestural activities contributing to the construction of a complete utterance. The verbal and non-verbal dimensions of communication operate synergistically. Cosnier (1997) proposes classifying communicative gestures into three main subcategories: quasi-linguistic, paraverbal, and synchronising. Our analysis focuses on quasi-linguistic gestures in Portuguese parliamentary debates. As Cosnier (1997, p. 4) notes, quasi-linguistic gestures are “...conventional gestures that can substitute for speech and are specific to a given culture (...). They generally have a verbal equivalent that can be used on its own, and they may also accompany speech, in which case they take on the status of an ‘illustrative’ gesture”. Some gestures, however, are shared across different linguistic and cultural communities. For example, nodding the head up and down usually signifies ‘yes,’ whereas shaking it from side to side usually signifies ‘no.’ These are prototypical quasi-linguistic gestures common to nearly all European language communities.

2.3 Ratified and unratified impoliteness

In our analysis of Portuguese parliamentary debates, we argue that impoliteness constitutes a defining feature of this plurilogal discourse genre. Furthermore, we posit that the notion of *expected impoliteness* represents a core genre parameter (Marques, Duarte & Seara, 2019).

Given the inherently confrontational nature of this interactional setting, we propose a distinction between *ratified* and *unratified impoliteness*, based on participants' responses. Considering that parliamentary debates are a plurilogal genre, the decisive criterion for classification is the presence or absence of an explicit reactive act—verbal or non-verbal—thereby determining whether an instance qualifies as ratified or unratified impoliteness.

We define *ratified impoliteness* as an instance in which the interlocutor silently accepts an impolite act: the absence of reaction renders the act consensual, thereby ratifying it. In such cases, impoliteness remains unnoticed within the flow of discourse. By contrast, *unratified impoliteness* presupposes that the interlocutor evaluates the act as inappropriate, producing a verbal or non-verbal reaction.

The distinction between these subcategories is grounded in the plurilogal turn-taking structure of parliamentary debates. *Ratified impoliteness* corresponds to an initiating impolite act that elicits no reactive intervention. *Unratified impoliteness*, in contrast, comprises an initiating impolite act followed by at least one reactive act, which may itself take the form of impoliteness.

Within the Portuguese Parliament, alongside Members of Parliament and government representatives, the President of the Assembly of the Republic may formally acknowledge impolite behaviour by issuing a warning. This procedural authority, however, is exercised only sparingly.

3 Results and Interpretation

3.1 Impoliteness in interventions and asides in Portuguese parliamentary debates

Acts of impoliteness occur both in the interventions of Members of Parliament (MPs) and government representatives, as well as in asides. However, regardless of whether they are ratified or unratified, such acts are particularly salient in asides, owing to the discursive status of these units. Since asides are not typically regarded as interruptions, they traditionally allow for less monitored and less formal language. In the example below, the speaker disregards, thereby implicitly accepting, an impolite act (*Isso é só conversa*) that questions the relevance of his speech:

(2) *O Sr. Francisco de Assis (PS): — (...) Isto é, um Estado social que garante um Serviço Nacional de Saúde; que garante, na educação, o primado indiscutível da escola pública;...*

O Sr. Bernardino Soares (PCP): — Isso é só conversa!

O Sr. Francisco de Assis (PS): — ... que garante um sistema de segurança social de natureza predominantemente pública (...) (DAR, 16 de abril de 2010)

‘Mr Francisco de Assis (PS): - (...) In other words, a social State that guarantees a National Health Service; that guarantees, in education, the indisputable primacy of public schools;...

Mr Bernardino Soares (PCP): - *That's just talk!*

Mr Francisco de Assis (PS): ... which guarantees a predominantly public social security system.’

Acts of impoliteness are also evident in interventions by those who take the floor, as illustrated in the following example:

(3) *Por isso, o Sr. Ministro tem o descaramento de dizer que não há cartelização. Não há porque ninguém quer ver!*

O Sr. Ministro da Economia, da Inovação e do Desenvolvimento: — A senhora é que vê! (DAR, 16 de abril de 2010)

‘That's why you have the impudence to claim that there is no cartelisation. There isn't one because nobody wants to see it!

Honorable Minister for Economy, Innovation and Development: - You are the one who sees it!’

The aggressiveness of the exchange (*o Sr. Ministro tem o descaramento de dizer*) is evident; however, it is not pursued further. Instead, the minister addresses the issue of cartelisation rather than responding to the impolite behaviour of the speaker. The Portuguese Parliament has a long-standing tradition of tolerance toward such situations. “Protests” are the most common form of reaction, serving to register disagreement in various ways, including *ad personam* attacks:

(4) *O Sr. Primeiro-Ministro: — [o governo] agradeceu essa carta e tomou a decisão de nomear um novo gestor para o PRODER. É assim que se comporta um Governo decente.*

Aplausos do PS.

Protestos do PSD.

Portanto, Sr. Deputado, o Governo vai nomear um novo responsável pelo PRODER.

O Sr. Deputado não quis fazer essa pergunta a ninguém, pois são questões de dignidade que talvez o senhor não esteja em condições de perceber ou de registar.

Protestos (DAR, 25 de Junho de 2009)

‘The Prime Minister: — [the government] thanked him for the letter and decided to appoint a new manager for PRODER. That is how a decent government behaves.

Applause from the PS

Protests from the PSD.

Therefore, Mr Deputy, the Government will appoint a new head of PRODER. You did not want to ask anyone that question, as these are matters of dignity which you may not be in a position to understand or acknowledge. Protests.'

It is the contextual issues of an argumentative and adversarial nature that determine whether a face-threatening act (FTA) is ratified or not, rather than the characteristics of the FTA itself. Impoliteness is primarily instrumental, functioning as an argumentative strategy that the adversary may also strategically ignore. Specific acts of impoliteness must be analysed in relation to how ongoing interactions are managed, as well as to the Parliament's capacity to establish itself as a forum for debate.

3.2 Verbal ratified impoliteness

Typically, ratified impoliteness is based on the functionalisation of participants:

(5) *O Sr. Paulo Portas (CDS-PP): — Sr. Presidente, Sr. Ministro da Administração Interna, preferia pensar que o Sr. Ministro estava a tentar evitar dizer a verdade sobre os números da criminalidade violenta no ano passado, porque o Sr. Ministro já os conhece. Mas ficámos hoje a saber que, para além de querer escondê-los, o Sr. Ministro é politicamente irresponsável. Como é que o senhor pode ter apresentado uma estratégia operacional para 2009 afirmando desconhecer os números da criminalidade violenta em 2008?* (DAR, 7 de março de 009)

'Mr Paulo Portas (CDS-PP): Mr President, Minister for Internal Affairs, I would prefer to think that you were trying to avoid telling the truth about last year's violent crime figures because you are already aware of them. However, today we have learned that you are not only trying to hide them but also being *politically irresponsible*. How could you present an operational strategy for 2009 while claiming to be unaware of the violent crime figures for 2008?'

In this excerpt, the impolite attack ("you are [...] being politically irresponsible") exploits the distinction between the personal and functional dimensions of the debaters' status. This discursive effect is achieved through the use of a modal adverb, which simultaneously narrows the scope of the adjective and mitigates the speaker's enunciative responsibility. By employing various linguistic and discursive resources that construct such a distinction, the speaker preserves the institutional and interpersonal relationship established with the opponent.

Several of the most common linguistic and discursive mechanisms involved in the referencing process that ratifies verbal impoliteness—particularly at the lexical level—have already been identified. Examples include metonymy, nominalisation, adjectivisation, target delocation, shifts from individual to collective targets, modalisation, referential discourse markers, and metadiscursive

expressions (Ilie, 2004; Marques, 2015). These mechanisms mitigate the impact of impolite acts within the framework of regulated impoliteness characteristic of parliamentary language.

Although this strategy is recurrent, it does not preclude ad personam attacks from occurring or remaining unchallenged by opponents, as illustrated in the following example:

(6) *O Sr. Mário Simões (PSD): — Sr. Presidente, termino dizendo que irei fazer chegar à Mesa um documento que prova que, quando a eletrificação da linha para Évora foi anunciada pelo governo do Partido Socialista, os Srs. Deputados do PCP não tomaram posição em defesa de Beja*
Protestos do PCP.

O Sr. João Oliveira (PCP): — Mentiroso! Mentiroso! Mentiroso! (DAR, 2 de setembro de 2011)

‘Mr. Mário Simões (PSD): - Mr. President, I'll finish by saying that I'll send the Bureau a document proving that, when the electrification of the line to Évora was announced by the Socialist Party government, the PCP Members of Parliament didn't take a stand in defense of Beja
PCP protests.

Mr. João Oliveira (PCP): - Liar! Liar! Liar!’

The ratification of impolite acts fosters the normalisation of aggression. However, it also entails significant relational and argumentative consequences. Impoliteness directly affects the speaker's social and discursive image, highlighting the importance of self-regulation both for the preservation of interpersonal relationships and for understanding the strategic use of impoliteness in political debates. Facework (Goffman, 1967) is a central component of this broader discursive activity.

3.3 Verbal unratified impoliteness

Unratified impoliteness can give rise to moments of varying degrees of aggressiveness. In the example below, a Member of Parliament, while taking the floor, engages in several impolite acts in response to a prior impolite act. These acts challenge the recipient's personal image, yet they do not elicit any response:

(7) *O Sr. Jerónimo de Sousa (PCP): — Em relação ao Código do Trabalho, o Partido Socialista, ao contrário do que muitos pensam, deu um contributo decisivo...*

O Sr. Ministro de Estado e das Finanças (Teixeira dos Santos): — E a vossa política está parada e você é o travão!

O Sr. Jerónimo de Sousa (PCP): — Espere lá um pouco, Sr. Ministro das Finanças, pois o senhor, cada vez que abre a boca, é um desastre! Portanto, agora, mantenha-se um pouco em silêncio. (DAR, 25 de setembro de 2008)

‘Mr. Jerónimo de Sousa (PCP): — Regarding the Labor Code, contrary to what many people think, the Socialist Party made a decisive contribution...

The Minister of State and Finance (Teixeira dos Santos): - *And your policy is at a standstill, and you are the one putting the brakes on it!*
Mr. Jerónimo de Sousa (PCP): - *Wait a minute, Mr. Minister of Finance, because every time you open your mouth, it's a disaster! So now, be quiet for a moment.'*

Strategic contextual factors seem to determine the end of the controversy, which would otherwise escalate. Besides constituting a confrontational relationship between adversaries, the primary aim of such exchanges is to persuade the Portuguese electorate. Consequently, the ways in which participants perform and respond to impolite acts are shaped by their broader management of the ongoing interaction. In this sense, impoliteness may be understood as an instrumental resource for accomplishing specific goals within political debate.

3.4 Non-verbal impoliteness in the Portuguese parliament

In the Portuguese Parliament, although instances of verbal impoliteness do occur, they are not a traditional feature of parliamentary discourse. The *Diário da Assembleia da República* (DAR) clearly relegates communicative gestures to a secondary role. Such gestures are typically reactive, often indicating agreement, such as applause, but more frequently they serve as expressions of protest. These protests may convey ideological differences among parliamentary groups or function as responses to verbal impoliteness.

(8) *O Sr. Paulo Rangel (PSD): - ... custe o que custar ao Partido Comunista e ao Partido Socialista!*

Aplausos do PSD

Protestos do PS

Protestos do Deputado do PCP Bernardino Soares, batendo com as mãos no tampo da bancada. (DAR, 3 de julho de 2009)

'Mr. Paulo Rangel (PSD): - ... whatever the cost to the Communist Party and the Socialist Party!

Applause from the PSD.

Protests from the PS.

Protests from PCP bench Bernardino Soares, banging his hands on the bench.'

(9) *O Sr. João Galamba (PS): — Lamento dizer, Srs. Deputados do PCP e do BE, mas, por muito que vos acompanhemos nas preocupações com os paraísos fiscais e com as SGPS, as vossas propostas não são sérias,...*

Protestos da Deputada do PCP Rita Rato.

... porque só fazem sentido num quadro em que Portugal existisse isolado do mundo. Como não é esse o caso, o PS não acompanha essas propostas.

Aplausos do PS. (DAR, 23 de setembro de 2011)

'Mr. João Galamba (PS): — I am sorry to say, Members of the PCP and BE, but, as much as we share your concerns about tax havens and holding companies, your proposals are not serious...

Protests from PCP Rita Rato.

...because they only make sense in a context where Portugal existed in isolation from the rest of the world. As this is not the case, the PS does not support these proposals. *Applause from the PS.*'

Occurrences of nonverbal impoliteness are documented in the DAR under the broad category of "protests," which are integrated into asides and encompass verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal behaviours attributed to either a group or an individual.

The significance of communicative gestures in the construction of Portuguese parliamentary debates extends beyond the records found in the DAR. Gestural mimicry constitutes a crucial dimension of confrontation within parliamentary discourse. This dimension is often highlighted through metadiscursive comments, which frame the interpretation of the adversary's actions:

(10) *O Sr. Primeiro-Ministro: - Ó Sr. Deputado, isso não ajuda à sua imagem pública. Esse ar descomposto. (...). Vê-lo assim descomposto, até a roçar um pouco a histeria, descontrolado. (DAR, 3 de julho de 2009)*

'The Prime Minister: - Oh, Mr. Deputy, that doesn't help your public image. That upset look. (...). Seeing you so upset, even bordering on hysteria, out of control.'

(11) *O Sr. Francisco Louçã (BE): — (...). Sr. Primeiro-Ministro, o problema é que, se é certa a medida que o Governo propõe para 2010 e 2011 — e escusa de pôr essa cara de raiva, ...*

Protestos do PS (DAR, 16 de abril de 2010)

'Mr. Francisco Louçã (BE): — (...). Prime Minister, the problem is that, if the measure proposed by the Government for 2010 and 2011 is correct — and there is no need to look so angry...

Protests from the PS'

(12) *O Sr. Bruno Nunes (CH): — (...). Por isso, esqueceram-se de fazer esta atualização e, agora, querem atropelar o Regimento.*

Protestos do PS.

Calma! Logo de manhã, já começam com a gritaria. Tenham calma. (DAR, 25 de maio de 2022)

'Mr. Bruno Nunes (CH): — (...). So, they forgot to make this update and now they want to override the Rules of Procedure.

Protests from the PS.

Calm down! First thing in the morning and they're already shouting. Calm down.'

The primary objective of the speakers is to discredit their opponents by attributing to them a lack of emotional discipline. Such behaviour is deemed inappropriate for political figures, whose role presupposes an attitude consistent with fairness and decorum (Marques, 2012).

3.5 Discursive bounds of non-verbal impoliteness

We focused on an unratified non-verbal impolite act, whose perlocutionary consequences underscore its relevance to the issue under analysis. The act occurred during a State of the Nation debate, an event marked by intense political tension and successive instances of impoliteness. It involved an *almost-linguistic gesture*, conveying disrespect and contempt. This gesture was performed in the Portuguese Parliament by the then Minister of Economy and Innovation, Manuel Pinho, in response to an aside by Bernardino Soares, a member of the PCP parliamentary group:

(13) *O Sr. Bernardino Soares (PCP): - O Sr. Ministro da Economia até lá foi levar o cheque da EDP ao clube desportivo!...*

Neste momento, registam-se protestos do Ministro da Economia e da Inovação Manuel Pinho, que, com os dedos indicadores na cabeça, faz um gesto a simular chifres

O Sr. Bernardino Soares (PCP): - Está a falar com quem?! Não fala assim para mim! Pensa que está a falar com quem?! (DAR, 3 de julho de 2009)

‘Mr Bernardino Soares (PCP): - The Minister of Economy even took the cheque from EDP to the sports club!

At this point, protests are heard from the Minister of Economy and Innovation, Manuel Pinho, who, with his index fingers on his head, makes a gesture simulating horns.

Mr Bernardino Soares (PCP): - Who are you talking to?! Don't talk to me like that! Who do you think you're talking to?!’

In addition to the standard recording in the DAR, the incident was also captured by national television channels and the official channel of the Portuguese Parliament, the Parliament Channel (Figure 1.):



Figure 1. Screenshot from *Canal Parlamento (ARTV)*

Media coverage of the episode provoked protests from members of parliament across all parties, as well as from the government itself. Consequently, two days later, Minister Manuel Pinho resigned, and his resignation was accepted by Prime

Minister José Sócrates. The reactions of the entire parliament underscore the gravity of this impolite act, which contravenes parliamentary dignity. The offended entity is the sovereign body itself, not merely an individual member of parliament:

(14) *O Sr. Paulo Rangel (PSD): Sr. Presidente, tivemos conhecimento, entretanto, de que se passou hoje aqui um ato grave de descortesia institucional por parte de um membro do governo para com o parlamento. (...). Trata-se de um ato intolerável (...)*

O Sr. Bernardino Soares (PCP): (...) é preciso, agora, é que seja reparada a ofensa ao Parlamento e à Assembleia da República. (...)

O Sr. Primeiro-Ministro: (...). Julgo ser meu dever, em nome do Governo, apresentar um pedido de desculpa a todos os grupos parlamentares, aos Srs. Deputados e ao Sr. Presidente. O que aconteceu é injustificável. (...)

A Sr.ª Heloísa Apolónia (Os Verdes): (...) todos ficámos indignados com a atitude a que tivemos oportunidade de assistir. (DAR, 3 de julho de 2009)

'Mr. Paulo Rangel (PSD): Mr. President, we have learned, in the meantime, that a serious act of institutional impoliteness was committed today by a member of the government toward Parliament. (...). This is an intolerable act (...)

Mr. Bernardino Soares (PCP): (...) it is necessary (...) to repair the offense to Parliament and the Assembly of the Republic. (...)

The Prime Minister: (...). I believe it is my duty, on behalf of the Government, to apologise to all parliamentary groups, to the Members of Parliament, and to the President. What happened is unjustifiable. (...)

Ms. Heloísa Apolónia (The Greens): (...) we were all outraged by the attitude we witnessed.'

Some conclusions can be drawn from this event. Impoliteness is a gradual discursive phenomenon, with its degree of aggressiveness varying according to the specific context. In the case under analysis, it manifests as a taboo gesture that violates parliamentary rules and traditions. Several factors, however, exacerbate the impolite act and its perlocutionary effects: (i) it was performed by an individual occupying a particularly significant socio-discursive and political position within a national institutional setting, specifically, a Government Minister during a State of the Nation debate; (ii) it transcended the physical boundaries of Parliament, as it was recorded by national television channels and broadcast immediately. The ensuing media coverage elevates it to the status of a discursive event of national relevance. Considering these and other contextual factors, the instrumental value of impoliteness previously defined appears to persist in such instances, which can be regarded as borderline cases.

4 Conclusions

This study analysed verbal and nonverbal impoliteness as a fundamental axis of parliamentary political discourse within the debate genre. Parliamentary debates

are characterised by an institutional genre style, which encompasses a pattern of impoliteness integrating both verbal and nonverbal elements. At the macro level, impoliteness can be conceptualised as a genre-specific parameter, anticipated and regulated primarily by parliamentary rules of procedure, but also by informal rules embedded in parliamentary tradition. It is important to emphasise that genre-specific impoliteness, expected in parliamentary debates, is directed at the role or group represented by the opponent rather than at the individual as a person. This functional orientation legitimises impoliteness and allows for the occurrence of mock impoliteness, understood as a matter of style, a deliberately and ritually exaggerated expression of conflict (Marques, 2009).

At the micro level, within each interaction, impoliteness can be considered both a potential choice by the speaker and an interpretative act by the addressees, who may or may not ratify each impolite act. Notably, there is considerable variation in participants' assessments of impolite acts during debates, as impoliteness serves instrumental functions for both the speaker and the target addressee.

In the analysis of discursive politeness, verbal impoliteness is the most frequent form; however, nonverbal impoliteness appears to challenge the traditional boundaries of Portuguese parliamentary tolerance more markedly than verbal impoliteness.

Regarding Portuguese society, the normalisation of impolite institutional interactions, without due attention to their complexity, likely has significant consequences for societal perceptions of such interactions. This may result either in the normalisation of these impolite patterns of interaction or to the delegitimisation of institutions, fostering the perception that all political conduct is mere pretence.

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