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Multimodal metaphors in speech and gestures: an analysis of political debates

oral presentation in workshop: 105 Embodied cognition and experiential approaches to communication, written and spoken discourse analysis. From hypothesis and empirical data to theoretical issues (Antoine AUCHLIN, Nathalie ILIĆ & Tea PRŠIR)

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MULTIMODAL METAPHORS IN SPEECH AND GESTURES: AN ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL DEBATES

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we aim to analyze the emergence of multimodal metaphors in online face-to-face interactions that belong to a political-electoral debate, taking into consideration three variables: the verbal, the prosodic – that belongs to the auditory modality – and the gestural – that belongs to the visual modality. We assume the hypothesis that the more entrenched the metaphoric expression is in our conceptual system, the harder it is to recognize such an expression as a metaphoric one. On the other hand, the less entrenched the expression is in our conceptual system, the easier it is to recognize it as a metaphoric expression.

In order to demonstrate the emergence of the metaphors in the modalities above, as well as the relation among them, we have selected scenes from two samples of a second-tour debate of the Brazilian presidential elections, broadcasted by Record, a Brazilian TV channel, in 2010. Based on the theoretical assumptions about the embodied mind, as well as an experientialist vision of the language, we have chosen the following categories to guide our analyses: multimodal metaphoricity in speech and gesture compounds, prosody as a body-based feature, compression and perlocutionary effects. Taking all these categories into consideration, we intend to perform a comparative analysis of the emergence of multimodal metaphors in the discourse of the two candidates that participated in the debate: Dilma Rouseff, from PT (Labor Party) and José Serra, from PSDB (Brazilian Social Democrat Party).

1. CONCEPTUAL GROUNDING

1.1 Embodiment and experientialism

According to the embodiment approach (JOHNSON, 2007), the construction of meaning depends on three dimensions: the brain, the body and the organism-environment interaction. Consequently, the concept of embodiment is anchored in a continualist vision, in which it is not necessary to introduce a new type of reasoning – as a distinct ontological basis

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of our sensorimotor pattern – for explaining the logical reasoning of abstract concepts. Therefore, the patterns of experience are relevant to our interactions.

Converging with the embodiment approach, the experientialist myth, formulated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), takes as perspective that human beings are part of the environment, rather than separated from it, focalizing on the constant interactions with their physical environment and with other human beings. These interactions with the environment involve a mutual exchange: human beings changes the environment, as well as the environment changes them. In other words, the nature of our bodies interacts with the environment and imposes a structure to our experience: recurring experiences lead to the formation of categories that are experienced *gestalts*, giving coherence to our experience. To confirm their point of view, the authors approach the metaphor as the central point of their theoretical construction.

1.2 Metaphoricity and compression in the political debate

Instead of speaking about the Conceptual Metaphor in terms of a static cognitive principle, the concept of Metaphoricity is, in our view, rather useful to approach the metaphor emergence in interactions, since Metaphoricity can trigger metaphorical elaborations in several modalities and successively over time. Therefore, Metaphoricity is approached as a general cognitive principle, in which metaphoric mappings are processed online. The analysis of syntactic, semantic, prosodic and gestural contexts reveals that Metaphoricity is a dynamic property of the linguistic items, which can be more or less on the foreground and, consequently, receive more or less focused attention. In the context of multimodal metaphoricity, it is possible to describe two patterns of the relation between gestures and speech (MÜLLER; CIENKI, 2009, p. 307):

1. It is possible to find the same source and the same target in different modalities. In these cases, the gesture embodies the source-domain of the verbal metaphoric expression, indicating that the metaphoricity of that expression was activated or was on the foreground of the speaker's attention.
2. It is also possible to find different sources and the same target in different modalities. In these cases, we find a gestural metaphoric expression, with a target that is verbalized in a non-metaphorical way.

Regarding the political discourse comprehension and, more specifically, the argumentation developed in the political-electoral debate, we highlight the importance of the compression processes promoted by Conceptual Blending Theory – CB (FAUCONNIER; TURNER, 2002). Extremely complex political matters (related to public administration, living, working, economical, and other conditions) would have to be ostensibly explained to an extremely heterogeneous public, requiring a great amount of time, if those matters should not be understood. The compression allows these complex matters to be metaphorically mapped/projected from more primitive domains of our experience. Consequently, the matters become easier to understand – but also concealable – in a shorter time, or, in other words, faster.

As the political-electoral debate is submitted to communicational rules that restrict the candidates' argumentation time and form, the discursive process of the electoral debate is strategically done through multimodal metaphors that compress the argumentation, producing experiential *gestalts*, in order to make it more efficient, in interactional terms. Based on the theoretical considerations made in this paper, we will discuss analysis models that can show the complexity of communicative exchanges that occur in our analysis *corpus*.

2. ANALYSIS MODELS

2.1 Experiential Blending

Experiential Blending (EB) is the integration of the abstract conceptual representation with the internal sensorimotor experiencing of the enunciation's material characteristics (AUCHLIN, 2008). According to Auchlin (2013), the EB is considered as a specific case of blending: two input spaces of substantially different levels are blended. One input space is the experience of the “here-and-now” of the enunciation and its materialistic proprieties – as build from a perceptive point of view. The other space is the linguistic and conceptual integration. Generally speaking, in the EB, blending consists of a human molding of the events of speech.

In short, we may suggest that there are two levels in EB: the first one is structural, a binding, in which we have an automatic integration of the input spaces and in which it is impossible to disintegrate the information of these spaces. This phase is linked to the four-dimensional elaboration of the internal experience, of space and time. Thus, the information may be considered as phenomenologically transparent. The second phase is related to the merger of the two input spaces and their properties; between what is said and how it is said. Consequently, the second phase consists of blending linguistic content and enunciation.

2.2 The Semiotic Model of Brandt and Brandt

The semiotic model of Brandt makes it possible to analyze how we cognitively process blendings. According to the authors (2005, p. 50), “The semiosis (the situation in which utterances or other sign exchanges occur) is the base for space building” (Brandt & Brandt 2005: 19). Therefore, in the Cognitive Semiotics model, an architecture of spaces projected by the subjects in their interactions is proposed. In this perspective, the notion of space can be translated by the projection of cognitive frames built by the subjects in their interactions.

In the version presented by Brandt (2005) and adapted by Miranda and Mendes (in press), the architecture of the spaces is composed by the: (i) basic semiotic space (which is unfolded in three spheres: the semiosis, strictly speaking, as an instance of language acts performed by the interlocutors; the communication situation, in which the participants of the interaction are found; and the wider phenomenological world, accessible to our experience); (ii) input spaces, called presentation spaces (textual instance) – unfolding in two dimensions: signifier (gestural and prosodic resources) and signified (linguistic resources) – and reference space (object instance); (iii) virtual space (blend), projected from the scenario elements (frames) selection of the last two spaces; and (iv) relevance space, which orients the emerging sense of the virtual space.

In the Cognitive Semiotics model, the integrations are built online and are sensible to the context, regarding both the input construction, and the semantic and pragmatic relevance of integrating these inputs. In our analyses, we present an attempt to integrate Auchlin’s and Brandt’s models in two samples of our *corpus*.

3. METODOLOGY

3.1 *Corpus* selection and data analysis

Starting from the model proposed by Brandt and Brandt (2005) for the metaphor analysis “This surgeon is a butcher!” and adding Oakley’s considerations (2009), we will approach the use of the proposed model, taking as a basis two parts of the Record debate: one belonging to Dilma Rouseff, from PT (Labor Party), and the other to José Serra, from PSDB (Brazilian Social Democrat Party).

Sequence #1

Dilma: I can't conceive that someone would want to take a winning ticket. There are two tickets, one isn't winning and the other is. Hand over the winning ticket, from which we can win our passport for the future, to foreign private companies.

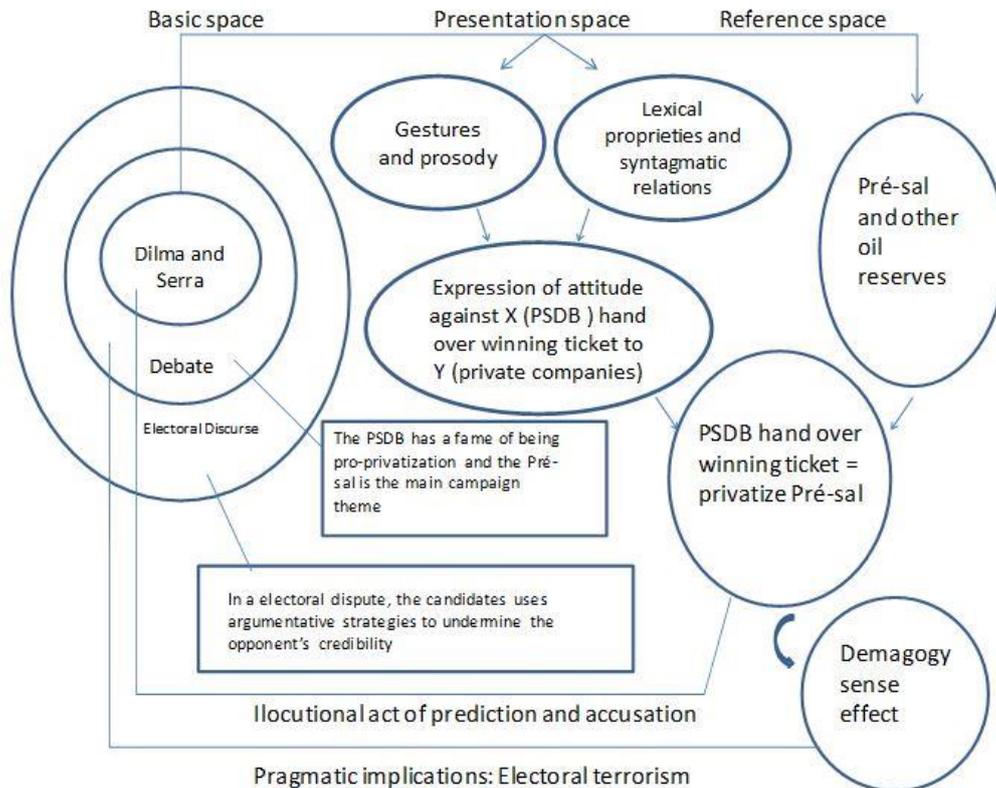


Figure 1: Adapted semiotic model, applied to Dilma's speech (Sequence #1)

As can be noticed, from the phenomenological point of view, the enunciative scene put into function is socio-culturally filtered by the political-electoral Discursive Field, in which, from the Argumentative point of view, the candidates use strategies to undermine the opponent's credibility. In the concerned communicative situation, the political-electoral debate, Dilma makes use of the PSDB's privatization fame, Serra's party, approaching the Pré-sal (oil reserves) privatization theme, main theme approached during the debate. Using an electoral terrorism strategy, the candidate foresees that the opponent will privatize the oil reserves and accuses him of this. When referring to the Pré-sal and the oil reserves, Dilma depicts them (figures 1-4 below) as a "winning ticket", staging the gesture of "taking the winning ticket", and a prosodic prominence is also found in the word "ticket". Through the use of this metaphor, the candidate compares the recently discovered oil reserves to the Pré-sal, explaining to the

viewer that “there are two tickets: one isn’t winning and the other is”, gesturally staging two objects that occupy opposite positions in space. She also uses the verbal-gestural metaphor “hand over the winning ticket”, that corresponds to the privatization of the oil reserves. Here we have a strongly metaphoric process, starting from some vital relations: analogy (petrol = winning ticket), space/time [right=future x left=past], cause-effect [Serra government → privatization of the Pré-sal] etc. The gestural analysis is described below:

(1)



Closed hands, next to each other, with folded fingers, positioned on the right side of the body.

(2)



Vertically opened left hand, with palms turned upwards and stretched fingers.

(3)



Vertically opened right hand, with palms turned upwards and stretched fingers

(4)



Closed right hand, folded fingers and half-stretched arm to the front

In the following Prosogram² (MERTENS, 2010), a sample is portrayed in which Dilma verbally and gesturally conveys several new metaphors. It is relevant to point out that, along the whole sample, the F0 curve – the bold black strip – shows high values. To us, they show the importance of the conveyed information, in addition to work as a directing element of the listener’s attention. The first prominence found – indicated by a capital P – is located in the last

² It is a plug-in that works on Praat (BOERSMA; WEENINCK, 2013) the well-known acoustic analysis software.

part of the utterance “I cannot conceive”, in which Dilma states her indignation concerning the oil reserves privatization. Two other prominences are located in the word “winning”, which is part of the new metaphor “winning ticket”. There is, therefore, an emphasis in the characterization of the ticket, which emphasizes the discovery’s importance. The two other highlighted prominences can be located in the first and third word that compose the phrase “foreign private companies”, object of Dilma’s critic, emphasizing the critique being made. The part shows a speech speed superior to the part in which the conventional metaphors are conveyed. – 5.17 x 4.71 – However, the speech rate of the sample is inferior to the speech rate of the full sample – 5.17 x 5.8.

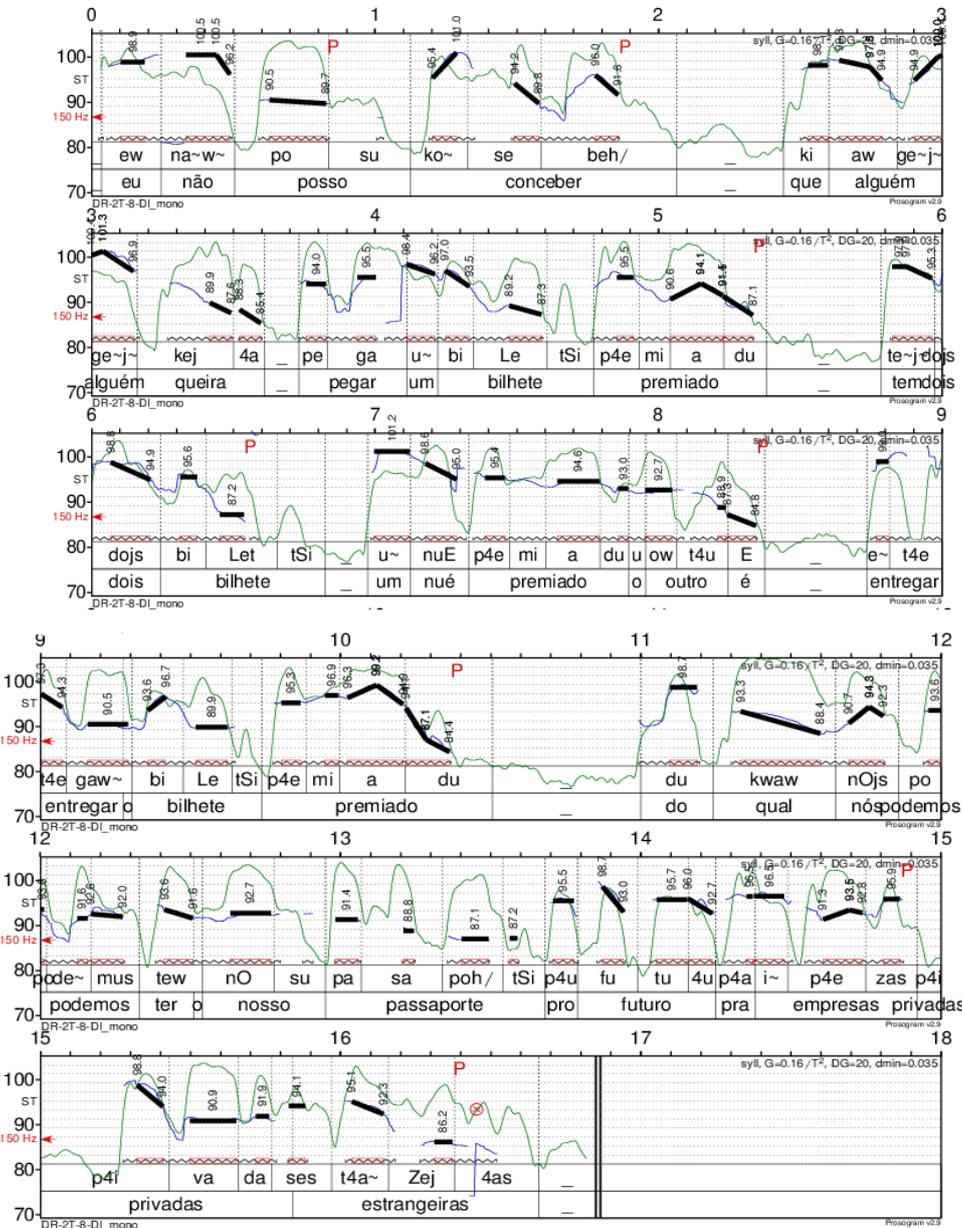


Figure 2: Prosogram of Sequence #1, generated from Dilma’s speech

The following sequence corresponds to a sample of Serra’s speech.

Sequence #2

I am saying all of this to say that, in reality, she lies, fabulates. Because she can't get to me through my administrative actions, through the righteousness of my public life, over forty years. So she comes and creates fantasies, makes foam, right, it is, making myths, with the sole purpose of deceiving the people from an electoral point of view.

In this sequence, Serra stands as an honest candidate and accuses his opponent of making up lies regarding his political life, aiming at deceiving the electors. This sequence can be represented as follows:

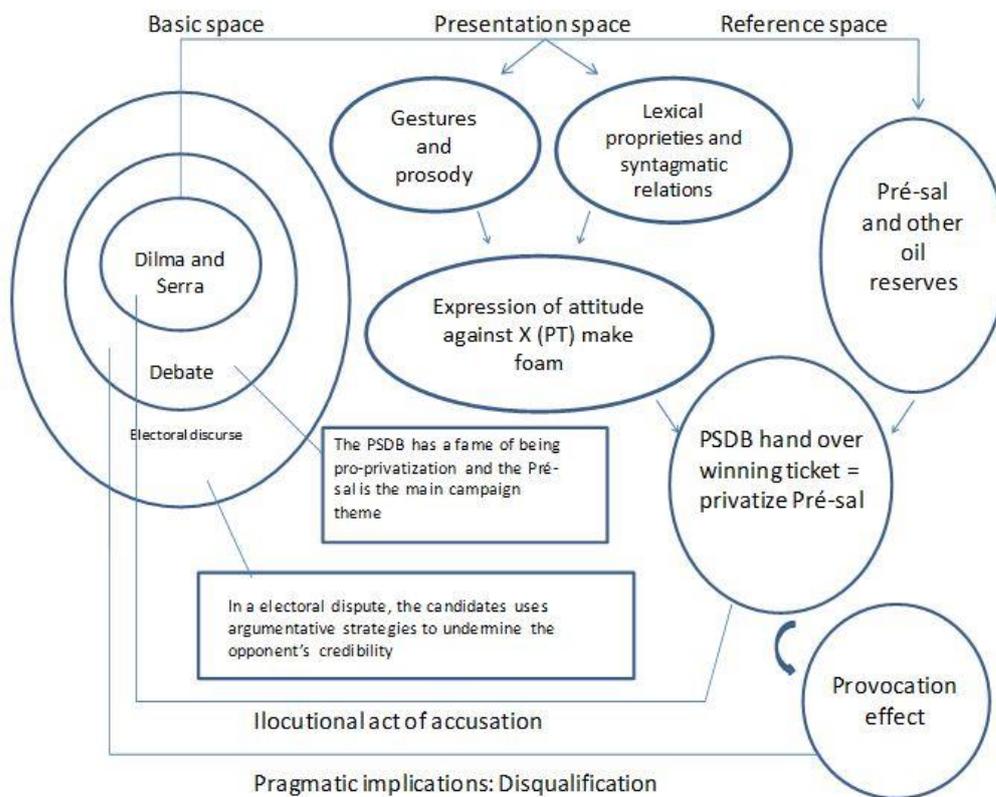


Figure 3: Adapted semiotic model, applied to Serra's speech (Sequence #2)

As can be noticed, from the phenomenological point of view, the enunciative scene put into action is socio-culturally filtered by the political-electoral Discursive Field, in which, from the Argumentative Relevance point of view, the candidates use strategies to undermine the opponent's credibility. In the concerned communicative situation, the political-electoral debate, Serra accuses Dilma, echoing the media accusations, that his opponent is untruthful and, consequently, the accusations that the PT is corrupt. From the point of view of the discursive strategies mobilized by the participants, Serra used "lying to the electors" as a reference,

representing it with a metaphor: “[She keeps] making foam”, which means “create”, “make up”, linked to wide circular gestures (gestures 2-3) and prosodic prominences. The gestural analysis is described below:

(2)



Wide gesture of the forearms, which open repeatedly in circles.

(3)



Wide gesture of the forearms, which open repeatedly in circles.

In the two gesture series performed by Serra, some variants of the conventional metaphor “LYING IS MAKING UP STORIES” are used: “LYING IS MAKING UP FANTASIES”, “LYING IS MAKING UP MYTHS”, and, finally, “LYING IS MAKING FOAM”. All of them belong to the narrative field, but the last occurrence constitutes a new use, while the others are conventional variants of the cited metaphor.

Serra uses a classic argumentative structure – If P, then Q – and uses metaphors to compose that structure: “If she can’t get to me, then she makes up, fabulates, makes foam”. The use of wide and repetitive gestures, in both examples, works as a mechanism of directing the listener’s attention: it is impossible not to notice the performed gestures. The mobilization of all these resources also results in provocation and disqualification perlocutionary effects targeting the opponent. In addition to that, the sequence of the presented metaphors promotes a compression of the speech turn, already indicated in the previous phrase: “I am saying all of this to say that ...”. We present the Prosogram (Mertens 2010) related to that sample hereunder:

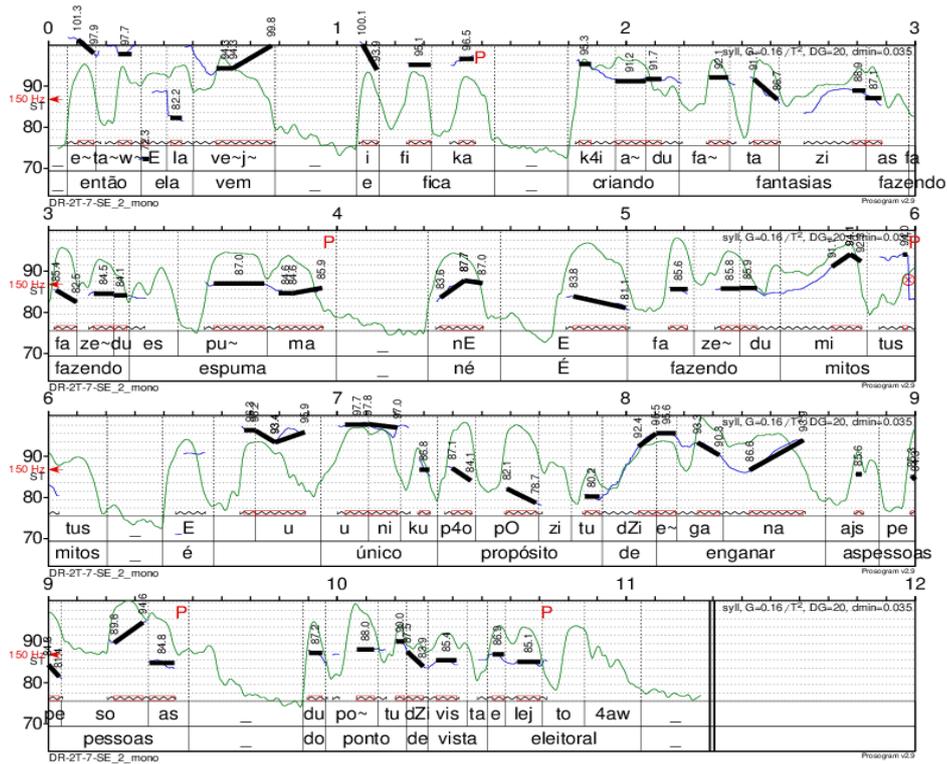


Figure 4: Prosogram of Sequence #2, generated from Serra's speech

The above Prosogram (Mertens 2010) refers to a sample, in which metaphors are conveyed, conventional and interactional, accompanied by gestures. It is important to notice that the F0 curve – represented by the bold black strips – represents high values, above 90 ST, in several parts, which shows the candidate's anger when speaking about the mechanism used by his opponent to deceive the electors. The first detected prominence can be found in the word “foam”, which composes the new metaphor “making foam”; the second can be found in the word “myths” that composes the conventional metaphor “making up myths”. The other prominences are not related to metaphor emergence: they are presented in the words “people” and “electoral”. The speech rate of the sample, 6.32, is significantly superior to the one of the full sample, 5.81. This data supports the hypothesis that metaphors are put on the foreground of the speaker's attention: the speech rate increase, combined with gestures and new verbal metaphors, directly results in directing the listener's attention.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the metaphoric use conveyed by both candidates, we notice that Dilma uses a lot of comparison resources between the two governments, Lula, the president at the time, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the former president, frequently associating the verbal metaphors to gestures that embody actions taken by the actual government, and comparing them to actions taken by the previous government. In these cases, the gestures as well as the verbal content are metaphoric and there is also a non-conventional use of metaphors, which are used as compression mechanism of the developed argumentation during the speech turn. To sum up, Dilma uses a lot of metaphors and gestures in her speech, which would increasingly direct the viewer's attention on what is being said, as well as on how it is said.

Regarding the metaphors used by Serra, the use of gestures frequently occurs when denouncing contradictory behaviors of his opponent. It is important to notice that, as Lula's government and the projects developed during that time presented a very high popularity rate, Serra does not criticize them directly. Instead, he tries to criticize Dilma personally. The use of wide and repetitive gestures, accompanied by metaphors, is a relevant mechanism to do it. The exaggerations as well as the repetition constitute attention-directing mechanisms (CALBRIS, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the multimodal metaphors used by the candidates enabled us to discover strategies used by them to convey a determined system of values and, with this, conquer or not the elector's vote. The performed analysis enabled us to validate the hypothesis that language is expressed by different modalities. For that reason, we can state that our conceptual system is broader than our linguistic system, and, within an electoral campaign, the words are not sufficient to build strategies: the activation of framings belonging to our conceptual system constitutes a decisive mechanism to the candidates' image construction, and to conquer the electors' votes.

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