

Military operation, war or invasion: the first Russian actions in Ukraine in 2022 according to the coverage of the media group in Brazil and Portugal

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to show which discursive formations, as defined by the French philosopher Michel Foucault in his work *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), were present in Brazilian and Portuguese printed journalism regarding Russia's military action unleashed on Ukrainian territory in February 24, 2022. This concept will also be discussed in light of the redefinitions of Michel Pêcheux, a French theorist of Discourse Analysis, who gave new contours to the Foucauldian notion. We analyzed 16 newspaper covers (eight Brazilian and eight Portuguese) published the day after the beginning of the Russian actions in Ukraine. Our reading observes the support of Portuguese media outlets for the Ukrainian cause and the demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin as responsible for the outbreak of the conflict; In the Brazilian case, the discursive formation around the war is very present, but Putin is part of a discursive formation that is different from that operated in Portugal.

Keywords: Brazilian journalism. Portuguese journalism. Russia. Speech analysis.

February 24, 2022, was marked on the international scene by the advance of the Russian government in beginning its “military operations” in eastern Ukrainian territory, a term that, for most Western countries, actually represented a euphemism for “invasion”, “occupation by

military forces” or simply “war” against Ukraine. The fact is that in the immediate aftermath, Russian actions were not limited to the eastern region, as in the following weeks there were bombings and fighting in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, and in southern regions of the country, such as the port cities of Odessa and Mariupol. Four months after the first Russian attacks on the neighboring country, the Western international community established numerous economic sanctions against the Russian government (especially with regard to blocking international banking transactions and boycotting the trading of Russian energy sources, such as gas and oil). The conflict, however, is far from presenting a solution and is already configured in public opinion as the biggest military confrontation between two nations in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

With the end of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the early 1990s, the republics formerly part of the Soviet empire began to gain their independence in a political process that took shape in September 1991. This was the case, in alphabetical order, from Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan – in addition to Russia, which also became a new national state and remained with practically the same territorial extension of former Russia, one of the then Soviet republics. The various governments that soon followed the recreation of the Russian State never welcomed the expansion into Eastern Europe of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a supranational organization of the so-called Western capitalist bloc created in 1949 shortly after the end of the Second, still in a strong Cold War context, to establish a front of cross-border military cooperation for its member states (Piccolli, 2015; Lira Nascimento, 2008; Mielniczuk, 2006; Gaspar, 1995).

In any case, the growing process of westernization of some of the former Soviet republics was established at the beginning of the 21st century without major threats or without the possibility of a reaction from Moscow, due to the weaknesses of the Russian State in the face of the new global geopolitical order (Lira Nascimento, 2008; Mielniczuk, 2006). Meanwhile, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia entered NATO in 2004. Of these three former Soviet republics, two (Latvia and Estonia), for example, maintain borders with Russia. In addition to these new member states, other nations formerly aligned or subordinated to the Soviet empire also joined NATO, symbolic cases of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic (admitted in 1999) as well as Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Slovenia – also admitted in 2004.

Tensions between the Kremlin (seat of the Russian government) and Western forces took on new contours in March 2014, during the third presidential term of Vladimir Putin, who was elected in 2012 to a six-year government. Putin ordered military intervention in Crimea, a Russian-majority region that is part of Ukrainian territory, arguing that it was necessary to protect Russian compatriots and combat persecution by the Ukrainian government in a region that proclaimed its independence in the face of Ukrainian state “extremism” (Kulike, 2014; Cunha Leite et al, 2020). At the same time, Moscow also began to support separatism in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, located in eastern Ukraine and which also had an ethnic Russian majority.

With a new re-election in 2018, for a term until 2024, Putin once again supported separatism in eastern Ukraine, which in the official Russian version became the argument for the “military operation” that began to take shape at the end of 2021 and which was finally carried out in February 2022. Volodymyr Zelensky’s election to the presidency of Ukraine in 2019 also served as justification for Russian initiatives, since the Ukrainian president did not show diplomatic or strategic ability to negotiate and put into practice the “Westernization” of his country is underway, with membership of NATO and entry into the European Union.

This brief historical contextualization, with the sequence of some events that preceded the Russian actions of February 24, 2022, serves us only to situate the historical time and the interspeech of the facts that would be reconstructed by newspapers around the world the following day, with representations of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Our intention in this article, far from occupying the reader with geopolitical, historical or political science issues, is to analyze how some Brazilian and Portuguese printed newspapers, on their covers on February 25, 2022, portrayed the first Russian attacks in Ukraine carried out on the eve.

Driven by our interest in the topic, we were able to collect 110 newspaper front pages from different countries around the world published on that date. As the object and corpus of research for this article, we restricted ourselves only to Portuguese-language outlets published in Brazil and Portugal, which totals 16 first pages – eight from Brazilian outlets and eight from Portuguese outlets. Our choice sought to contrast a European vision and a South American vision in the face of the extraordinary events that began to pit two European countries militarily against each other at the beginning of the 21st century, on a continent that had not experienced this state of affairs since the Second World War, which ended in 1945.

In the case of Portugal, it is also necessary to consider the fact that the country, since 1949, has been a founding member of (NATO, or NATO, in its acronym in English, for the Portuguese) and a member of the European Union since 1986. In this case, from Brazil, the dubious position of the Brazilian government in 2022 draws attention; on the one hand, since his electoral campaign, President Jair Bolsonaro has taken a strong stance against left-wing movements and what Bolsonaro forces called “communism” – such as the Russian and Soviet heritage in the formation of several left-wing parties in Brazil in the 20th century. XX –, on the other hand, Bolsonaro himself showed sympathy for the geopolitics of the Russian government, especially the actions of President Vladimir Putin, which was demonstrated on the occasion of an official visit to Moscow also in February 2022. Soon after a meeting with Putin in the Kremlin on February 16 – a few days before the start of Russian “military operations” – Bolsonaro stated that Brazil was “in solidarity with Russia” and that, due to Brazilian interest in Russian gas, oil and fertilizers, both countries had “a lot to collaborate on”. And even after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Brazilian diplomacy did not take a frontal stance against Russia, abstaining whenever the United Nations (UN) put some form of sanction against the Putin government to a vote.

The aim of this paper is to show what discursive formations, as defined by the French philosopher Michel Foucault in his work *The Archeology of Knowledge*, originally published in

1969, constituted the reconstruction of these facts in Brazilian and Portuguese printed journalism. This notion of “discursive formation” will be further extended to the redefinitions proposed by Michel Pêcheux, the main theoretician of what is conventionally called French-style Discourse Analysis and who, in a work published in 1971, sought to give new contours to Foucault’s concept of discursive formation. This alleged opposition between Pêcheux and Foucault will form the basis of the theoretical and methodological basis of the readings proposed here.

Our selection of 16 printed diaries includes vehicles from four regions of Brazil, represented by some of the country’s main capitals, and Portuguese vehicles from the capital (Lisbon), the north of the country (city of Porto) and the central region (where located in the city of Coimbra). In the following table, we list in alphabetical order the newspapers that make up our object of analysis:

Table 1 – List of newspapers that make up our analysis corpus.

Brazilian Newspapers	Portuguese Newspapers
Correio Braziliense (DF)	Correio da Manhã (Lisbon)
Estado de Minas (MG)	Diário de Coimbra (Coimbra)
Folha de S. Paulo (SP)	Diário de Notícias (Lisbon)
O Estado de S. Paulo (SP)	Jornal I (Lisbon)
O Globo (RJ)	Negócios (Porto)
O Povo (CE)	Jornal de Notícias (Porto)
Super Notícia (MG)	O Jornal Económico (Lisbon)
Zero Hora (RS)	Público (Lisbon)

It is worth noting that the selection of these covers sought to meet representation and circulation criteria of the respective newspapers in Brazil and Portugal. The eight Brazilian newspapers listed here are among the ten with the highest circulation in the country.¹ In the case of Portuguese vehicles, five of the titles gathered here are among the best-selling among the so-called “generalist” newspapers²: Correio da Manhã, Jornal de Notícias, Jornal I, Público and Diário de Notícias. We chose to also include Diário de Coimbra, from the city of Coimbra, an important university hub and the third largest in the country after Lisbon and Porto) and two business newspapers that have national distribution and relevance as opinion leaders.

1 Despite the continued decline in printed newspaper readers in Brazil, there was an increase in sales in digital versions. See data updated in June 2021 on the Poder 360 portal, available at: <https://www.poder360.com.br/brasil/circulacao-imprensa-de-grandes-jornais-cai-12-nos-5-primeiros-meses-do-ano/>. Access on: June 15th. 2022.

2 Available at: <https://www.cmjornal.pt/tv-media/detalhe/cm-reforca-lideranca-e-e-o-jornal-diario-preferido-dos-portugueses>. Access on: June 10th. 2022.

Relatively stable types of discourse and discursive formations

Before moving directly to the concept of discursive formation, it is worth mentioning the distinction proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1992) between primary genres (those based on ordinary and everyday communication, whether oral or written) and secondary genres (constituted by forms more complex discursive forms), since this is a notion of particular importance for the reading proposed here, as it is about honoring within the framework of communication studies not only the forms originating from natural languages, but also those arising from media discourse, such as the front pages of printed newspapers:

The secondary genres of speech – the novel, the theater, the scientific speech, the ideological speech, etc. – appear in circumstances of more complex and relatively more evolved cultural communication, mainly written: artistic, scientific, sociopolitical. During the process of their formation, these secondary genders absorb and transmute the primary (simple) genders of all species, which were constituted in circumstances of spontaneous verbal communication (BAKHTIN, 1992, p. 281).

The selection of the texts that make up the corpus of this article also sought to meet the establishment of a specific “discourse genre”, according to Bakhtinian terminology. For the Russian critic, genre would represent a linear sequence of certain statements, a sequence made possible by the particular use of language in the production of messages located in the time and space specific to a culture:

Any utterance considered in isolation is, of course, individual, but each sphere of language use develops its ‘relatively stable types’ of utterances, which are what we call speech genres (BAKHTIN, 1992, p. 279).

The use of language obviously allows for the emergence of infinite discursive forms. However, certain statements, although they may vary in content and structure, would retain some common characteristics, that is, they would preserve what Bakhtin calls “relatively stable types”. One of the purposes of our analysis is precisely to look for the establishment of these types of relatively stable statements, based on the covers of newspapers printed on February 25, 2022, after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. However, if for Bakhtin the notion of genre was related to the consignment of relatively stable statements, a new formulation that emerged at the end of the 1960s will prove to be more appropriate for the classification that we intend to undertake in our corpus. This is, as we have previously stated, the concept of discursive formation introduced by Michel Foucault and on which our analyzes will be centered.

For Foucault, statements, even if different in their form and dispersed in time, are capable of forming “a set when they refer to one and the same object” (FOUCAULT, 2004, p.

36). It is this set of statements, defined by certain common characteristics (whether linguistic or thematic), that we call discursive formation.

To understand this better, we start from the idea that discourses, including media discourse, make use of certain conceptual organizations, certain groupings of content (themes) and forms of enunciation, as Foucault explains:

Whenever it is possible to describe, among a certain number of statements, a similar system of dispersion and it is possible to define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions, functionings, transformations) between the objects, the types of enunciation, the concepts, the thematic choices, we will have a discursive formation (FOUCAULT, 1986, p.43).

In this way, the discursive formation presupposes a singularity that allows the transition from dispersion to regularity. For Foucault, the mechanisms that determine the functioning of a discursive formation, presuppose a system of multiple relationships between objects, enunciative types and strategies. A discursive formation, therefore, “determines a regularity specific to temporal processes”, since it articulates a series of discursive events with other series of events, transformations and processes. For him, a discursive formation

(...) it does not, therefore, play the role of a Figure that stops in time and freezes it for decades or centuries: it determines a regularity specific to temporal processes; establishes the principle of articulation between a series of discursive events and other series of events, transformations, mutations and processes. It is not a timeless form, but a correspondence scheme between different time series (FOUCAULT, 2009, p.83).

Foucault further understands that a discursive formation or a training system comprises:

(...) a complex bundle of relationships that function as a rule: it prescribes what must be correlated in a discursive practice, so that it refers to this or that object, so that it uses this or that enunciation, so that it uses such concept, so that you can organize this or that strategy. Defining a training system in its singular individuality is, therefore, characterizing a discourse or a group of statements by the regularity of a practice (cf. FOUCAULT, 2009, p. 86).

For Foucault, therefore, the norms that determine a discursive formation are constituted through a system of relationships between concepts, strategies and objects. The discursive formation, composed of these elements, then goes beyond dispersion and heads towards a certain regularity.

It is worth mentioning, however, that Michel Pêcheux, the founding author of what is conventionally called French-style Discourse Analysis, also established a distinct definition for the concept of “discursive formation”. For a broader understanding of the hypothetical dispute between Foucault and Pêcheux on this issue, we highlight at least four articles, which are quite enlightening for us: “Discursive formation and discourse in Foucault and Pêcheux: reading notes for discussion”, by Roberto Leiser Baronas (2011); “Discursive formation, memory networks and social paths of meaning: media and production of identities”, by Maria do Rosário Gregolin (2005); “A notion with two founders: discursive formation”, by Thiago Barbosa Soares (2018); and “The concept of discursive formation in discourse analysis: Foucauldian contribution to the constitution of an interdisciplinary field of knowledge”, by Pedro Farias Francelino (2005). If in Foucault’s work the concept of discursive formation initially appears in the book *The Archeology of Knowledge*, released in 1969 – as already mentioned –, in Michel Pêcheux the concept is present in the article “Semantics and the Saussurean cut: language, language and discourse”, written in 1971 co-authored with Claudine Haroche and Paul Henry.

For Pêcheux, it would be necessary to epistemologically abandon Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic proposals and look at the issue of discourse from historical materialism (here, the influence of the writings of one of his mentors, the philosopher Louis Althusser, stands out, according to which things and objects could be put into perspective with ideology). Pêcheux thus reaffirmed what he had already been developing – and which he would formalize in later writings – around Discourse Analysis, according to which discourse and context were inseparable.

Each ideological formation thus constitutes a complex set of attitudes and representations that are neither “individual” nor “universal”, but which refer more or less directly to “class positions” in conflict with each other (PÊCHEUX, 2011 [1971], p.73). For Pêcheux, discursive formation is “that which, in a given situation, determined by the state of class struggle, determines what can and should be said (articulated in the form of a harangue, a sermon, a pamphlet, an exhibition, a program, etc. (PÊCHEUX, 1995, p. 160). We thus see that Foucault’s conception of discursive formation is subordinated to the notion of knowledge, and not to the notion of ideology, as will occur with Pêcheux, who is influenced by Louis Althusser’s Marxist bias, which prioritizes the class struggle in the constitution of social relations.

On the other hand, Pêcheux will emphasize the relationship between discursive formation and its interspeech, a heterogeneous exterior with which it maintains a direct relationship. For him, a discursive formation is constituted by what is external to it, a central concept for the epistemological constitution of Discourse Analysis, which seeks to seek relationships of conflict, adherence or silencing between the discourse itself and its interlocutors (Brandão, 1991; Orlandi, 1999). Each discourse would refer to other discourses, in the form of affirmation, contract, denial, contradiction, etc. The meaning of the discursive formation would be related to an ideological exterior, linked to an ideological formation. Thus, as important as analyzing the discourse would be to analyze the production conditions in which it was generated and subsequently consumed:

Speech is not a miraculous aerolith, independent of the memory networks and social trajectories in which it erupts just by its existence; every discourse marks the possibility of a destructuring-restructuring of these networks and paths: every discourse is the potential index of a disturbance in the socio-historical affiliations of identification, insofar as it constitutes at the same time an effect of these affiliations and a work (more or less conscious, deliberate, constructed or not, but in any case crossed by unconscious determinations) of displacement in its space (PÊCHEUX, 1997, p. 56).

As we have seen, if the theoretical foundations on which Pêcheux bases the definition of the concept of discursive formation point to a tradition of the heritage of Marxist thought in Western Europe, Foucault bases his definition on a historicist tradition, based on the separation between classes and class struggle (something initially rejected by Pêcheux in his reading of Foucault). In short, it is up to the discourse analyst to investigate the complex conditions (which are, at the same time, linguistic and extralinguistic) in which a given utterance is finally being conceived and disseminated.

In our study, we have chosen to initially work in the wake of Foucault's contribution because we understood that the historicist tradition would be suitable for the scope and purpose we wish to achieve. In any case, we cannot ignore Pêcheux's contribution, who prefers to include the ideological affiliations of each speech in the discursive analysis, something that will also be of great use for our reading. The linguists cited here, in fact, show a certain consensus in perceiving that the alleged opposition between Foucault and Pêcheux with regard to the definition of the concept of discursive formation does not exactly constitute a contradiction or an opposition between the two formulations, even considering the fact that Pêcheux having revised his position in later writings and approaching Foucauldian postulations (SOARES, 2018; GREGOLIN, 2005).

The war, the invasion and the military operation on the first pages in Portuguese

On February 25, 2022, Brazilian and Portuguese newspapers tried to articulate a specific discursive event (the Russia-Ukraine conflict) in the midst of different processes and time series. Given the 16 layers that we managed to gather, several correlations, positions, functions and transformations were put into motion, and our effort will be to show the regularity of these correlations, positions, functionings and transformations. It is as if we were searching for a survey of the 'relatively stable types' of utterances (we borrowed Bakhtin's expression, although we are not referring here to the notion of genre) that printed journalism in Brazil and Portugal set in motion to portray and reconstruct Russian military operations on Ukrainian soil – or the beginning of the Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine. In short, our goal is to identify which discursive formations gained strength in this particular historical moment.

Of the 16 newspaper covers gathered in our corpus of analysis, we will initially divide them between the vehicles from Brazil and those from Portugal, and then place them in an expanded perspective. Methodologically, we sought to highlight both the verbal discourse (headlines/titles and fine lines on the covers) and the visual discourse (images or illustrations that accompany the title).

Four Brazilian newspapers (50%) - Correio Braziliense, Estado de Minas, O Povo and Super Notícia - composed a discursive formation around the concept of war and the unequivocal notion that Russia disrespected international bilateral agreements by bombing cities in Ukraine. Two other newspapers (37.5%) - Folha de S. Paulo and O Globo - although they didn't use the term "war" on their front pages, composed their headlines with verbs (invade and attack) whose semantic content pointed to an action of force or an **unlawful action** provoked by the Russian government. Lastly, two newspapers (25%) - O Estado de S. Paulo and Zero Hora - preferred to give an approach whose semantic load did **not completely delegitimize** Russian actions (O Estado uses the expression "entry of Russian troops into eastern Ukraine", while Zero Hora states "Russian troops on their way to Kiev"). It is also important to mention that **Vladimir Putin** is named in three headlines (Correio Braziliense, Folha de S. Paulo and Estado de S. Paulo) and appears in a secondary way in the fine lines of three other newspapers (O Globo, Zero Hora, Estado de Minas), which could configure another discursive formation around the figure of the Russian president. However, contrary to what we will see in Portuguese newspapers, there are no images, illustrations, cartoons, etc. of Putin in Brazilian newspapers.

In the case of Portuguese newspapers, four vehicles (50%) also adopt a discursive formation around the war (Correio da Manhã, Diário de Notícias, Negócios and Público). Another discursive formation uses the representation of Vladimir Putin through photographs or illustrations, which occurs in four vehicles, or also 50% (Diário de Coimbra, Diário de Notícias, Jornal I and O Jornal Económico). And an original and unique discursive formation is placed on the brand by Jornal de Notícias, with **support for Ukraine** and the headline "Solidarity with the Ukrainian people", which appears above a Ukrainian flag placed on a black background on the page.

Let us now move on to a more detailed reading of each of the newspapers, based on a reflection on the discursive formations listed here, starting with Brazilian outlets. Correio Braziliense (Figure 1), an outlet from Brasília (DF), the country's capital, creates a headline in which discursive formations around the idea of **war** and President **Vladimir Putin** take shape: "Putin intensifies war and threatens the world". In the thin line, at the top, terms semantically aligned with the notion of force and coercion stand out ('invades', 'warns', 'will face never-before-seen consequences', 'asphyxiate', 'economic restrictions'). Finally, the counterpoint coming from the streets? "Protesters call for peace." It is as if the conflicts were related to international political actors (Putin and Biden, president of the USA), while the solution to end the conflict derived from public demonstrations. Still at the top of the page, four photographs show an accusatory discursive construction towards Russia and especially Putin, with the inscriptions '#Stop Russian', 'Stop Putin', 'Putin = Hitler', 'Stop War', as well as a protester in

Moscow being contained by Russian police forces. In the center of the page, the construction of the warlike visual discourse is intensified with images of a building hit by explosive devices in the Ukrainian city of Chuguev (or Chuhiv, in Ukrainian, or even Chuguyev), alongside bodies of dead people, a popular injured a tank during a military operation.

The Estado de Minas (Figure 2), from Belo Horizonte (MG) participates in identical discursive constructions, whose visual discourse uses the same photograph of the building hit in eastern Ukraine, alongside an image of a battle tank and a Ukrainian citizen in tears, wrapped in the flag of her country. The headline is the one that most prominently features the concept of war on the cover, with bold letters, in capital letters, and the title “War in Europe”. The semantic choices of the thin line also point to the notion of coercion and force, with the terms ‘reacts’, ‘invasion’, ‘largest economic sanction in history’, ‘Russian troops advance’, ‘worst crisis since World War II’. Putin appears on the line, not as an agent who is responsible for the facts, but as a guarantor and coordinator of the actions: “Putin says he is prepared”.

Figure 1 – Correio Braziliense



Figure 2 – Estado de Minas



The discursive formation of the war continues on the covers of *O Povo* (Figure 3) and *Super Notícia* (Figure 4). The newspaper from Fortaleza (CE) includes an image that is not used by the other vehicles analyzed here and which depicts a citizen on Chuguev street, with dark smoke in the background due to the bombing at the city’s airport. The headline points to a North American view of the conflict (“Troops approach Kiev to overthrow government, says US”) and is headed by a hat that says “War in Ukraine”. Below the headline are notes on economic issues related to rising prices and inflation.

Super Notícia, a popular daily in Belo Horizonte (MG), had presented the headline “The horror of war back”, also in all caps. Above, the flags of Ukraine and Russia appear as if in a sporting confrontation, echoing the photograph and text at the top, on the left: “Brazilian players ask for help”, in clear reference to the dozens of footballers from Brazil – and their family members – who played at the time for clubs in Kiev and Donetsk. The central photograph repeats an image that had already been published on the cover of *Correio Braziliense*, but there with less prominence: tanks and soldiers in action.

Figure 3 – *O Povo*



Figure 4 – *Super Notícia*



On the right, below the image, a semantic body around the ideas of coercion, pain and suffering (“Russian army troops are invading Ukraine in attacks by land, sea and air. There are already more than a hundred dead, and around of 100 thousand Ukrainians left the country in a mass flight”) makes up the other meaning effects of this cover.

Folha de S. Paulo (Figure 5) and O Globo (Figure 6), from Rio de Janeiro (RJ) did not use the term “war” on their covers, but both newspapers printed photos with people killed in the city of Chuguev in amid Russian bombings – an option that could suggest deontological debates that go beyond the scope of this article.

Figure 5 – Folha de S. Paulo



Figure 6 – O Globo



In any case, Folha's headline embodies the Russian president's authorship and responsibility for the acts: “Putin attacks Ukraine and triggers greater action in Europe

by land, sea and air, Russia's army advances on the territory of Ukraine and is close to the capital. Vladimir Putin said he was ready for international pressure. The Ukrainian government stated that it will not give up on freedom." The image on the cover repeats the options of other Brazilian vehicles (it is a building hit by missiles in Chuguev).

O Estado de S. Paulo, however, established a discursive formation different from that of its competitors: it did not use the terms 'war' or 'invasion', nor did it depict scenes of bombing on Ukrainian soil; on the contrary, it used an image of Russian troops grouped in Rostov, still on Russian soil, and titled its cover ("Putin announces entry of Russian troops into eastern Ukraine") with a semantic load that alleviates the discursive formations around pain, of the Ukrainian conflict or suffering. Even the newspaper's fine line extends the process of purging the war that we saw in the other seven newspapers analyzed here: "Decision comes two days after Moscow recognizes two separatist areas".

In the case of Portuguese newspapers, discursive formations prevail around the concept of war and the demonization of President Putin. Correio da Manhã (Figure 9), the most popular and best-selling newspaper in 2022, chooses to print the same scene on the cover of Folha de S. Paulo, with a corpse and the bombing in Chuguev.

Figure 9 – Correio da Manhã



Figure 10 – Público



The verbal elements are also unambiguous in their effect of protecting the values of the Western European world, whether in the headline (“War returns to Europe”) or in other headlines (“Putin orders invasion”; See the maps of the Russian attack in Ukraine”; 1800 Portuguese soldiers ready to defend the NATO border”; “Coach Paulo Fonseca experiences anguish with his family in Kiev” – in reference to the Portuguese coach who lived in Ukraine).

Público (Figure 10), a generalist newspaper with an unpopular profile, has a cover similar to Correio da Manhã: “War returns to Europe”. However, the presence of images with corpses is refuted here, but a photograph is used that possibly also refers to the bombing of an airport in Chuguev. Furthermore, the beginning of the thin line includes the vehicle in the same discursive formation that revolves around the Russian presidency’s responsibilities for the conflict: “Putin invades Ukraine, in one of the biggest offensives on the continent since World War II”.

Negócios (Figure 11) uses as the central image on its cover a photograph frequently reproduced in newspapers around the world, with a Ukrainian citizen wearing bandages on her head and her face covered in blood.

Figure 11 – Negócios



Figure 12 – Diário de Notícias



The headline “The dawn of war” inserts the newspaper into the same discursive formation that has already been addressed here in other vehicles, namely, the notion of the

war unleashed by Russian forces. Furthermore, the cover stories referring to the conflict cover economic themes, within the editorial scope of the vehicle.

Diário de Notícias (Figure 12), on the other hand, stands out among all the newspapers in our corpus for two reasons: it was printed in big red letters, in capital letters and on a black background, with the term ‘war’ occupying 1/3 of the cover space; also printed the image of Vladimir Putin with red spots on his body (as if they were marks of blood) and a raised middle finger, in a chromatic and image composition that recalls part of the poster for the film *The Godfather* (1972), by Francis Ford Coppola. In another interspeech, Putin’s pointing finger goes back to several images of the leader of the Russian Revolution, Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov (popularly known as Lenin), and to Soviet propaganda posters that portrayed him as a superior being:

Figure 12a – Propaganda poster of the Russian Revolution with the inscription: “Forward with the world revolution under the banner of Lenin!”



The thin line claims that “Russia’s invasion of Ukraine leaves more than a hundred dead. The world responds with sanctions and the next weapon is called SWIFT”, referring to the global banking transaction code that could be blocked from transactions with Russian banks. In any case, Diário de Notícias is the only vehicle studied here that gives Putin a voice, with the transcription of the Russian president’s speeches: “Putin justifies himself: ‘Demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine is one of the objectives of the military operation’.”

Jornal I (Figure 13) also uses an interesting interdiscursive construction by replacing Lenin’s image with that of President Putin in a famous poster praising the Russian Revolution (Figure 13a). Just as the 1917 Revolution gave rise to the work “Ten Days that Shook the World”, by American journalist John Reed, Putin’s actions provoked “The day Europe shook”, according to the headline in I. At the beginning of the line is a thin reminder that the nuclear risk cannot be ignored.

Figure 13 – *Jornal I*

Figure 13a – Viktor Ivanov poster: “Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live!” Poet Vladimir Mayakovsky



The Jornal Económico (Figure 14) also used an illustration with Putin’s face, within the most recurrent discursive formations in Portuguese journalism in the face of this conflict: that of marking the notion of ‘war’ or ‘invasion’ and also that of presenting the figure of Putin as the person most responsible for this state of affairs. The headline constructs this effect of meaning in a peremptory way: “Putin invades Ukraine and threatens Europe”. The other headlines refer to economic issues (impact on the economy, increase in oil, gas and gold prices)

and the “caution” of the West in wanting to move forward with sanctions, but in order to avoid conflict with Russia.

The *Diário de Coimbra* (Figure 15) also stood out from the usual coverage of Portuguese-Brazilian newspapers with the option of printing its cover with the blue and yellow colors of the Ukrainian flag. Furthermore, just below the name of the newspaper, it included the inscription “Solidarity with Ukraine” and equated Putin with Adolf Hitler with the headline: “Putin equal to Hitler against democracy”. Two of the headlines below the headline are even more corrosive: “Military offensive ordered by fascist dictator killed dozens of Ukrainians”; and “International community promises devastating sanctions on the Russian regime”. To further intensify these effects of meaning, the selected image brings together a young man in Romania holding a poster in which the faces of Hitler and Putin create a graphic symbiosis. The caption of the photograph also states: “The world woke up in shock after dictator Putin attacked Ukraine just as Hitler, in 1939, did in Poland, triggering World War II.” Here we can see the recurrence of terms (“dictator, fascist, shock, democracy, etc.) that place the entire burden of action in Ukraine on Vladimir Putin’s shoulders.

Figure 14 – *O Jornal Económico*



Figure 15 – *Diário de Coimbra*



Finally, we have a discursive formation that advances even further in demonstrating support for the Ukrainian cause in temporarily withdrawing such journalistic “impartiality”, a concept frequently touted by media companies (to the same extent that it is dismantled by discourse analysts). This is the cover of *Jornal de Notícias* (Figure 16), which opts for an all-black background occupied in the center by the Ukrainian flag. At the top, the headline (or inscription) “Solidarity with the Ukrainian people”, which is also translated in Ukrainian at the bottom.

Figure 16 – *Jornal de Notícias*



As often happens on extraordinary occasions (deaths of international celebrities, terrorist attacks, accidents, etc.), it is not uncommon for newspapers to use a black background on their front pages to visually represent the idea of grief and pain in the face of a particular event. It is also common for national flags to be used in media to honor or celebrate a particular event related to a nation. However, the unusual aspect of this cover of *Jornal de Notícias* lies precisely in the fact that the Portuguese daily explicitly assumes support for one of the sides involved in a conflict that brings together two countries with which Portugal maintains diplomatic relations and with which it has established a friendly history of receiving migratory flows from Eastern Europe in the last three decades.

On the other hand, some newspaper covers analyzed here sought not to repeat the chorus of the majority, as was the case in Portugal with *Jornal de Notícias* and solidarity with the Ukrainian people and *Diário de Coimbra* with the Hitler-Putin symbiosis; Both vehicles established discursive formations that distanced themselves from the ordinary manufacturing mechanism of conventional journalism. In this way, it can be seen that these first newspaper pages, with more “original” discursive formations, also ended up setting in motion one of the phenomena of “two-level social construction”, an expression used by the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1997) regarding of today’s sporting competitions. For Bourdieu, the athlete and his performance are part of a spectacle that is produced twice: in the first instance, we have the production operated by sports agents *strictu sensu*, that is, all the people who are directly involved in the realization and conduct of the game (athletes, judges, technical committee, medical staff, organizers and, to a certain extent, the audience); in a second instance, there is the production of the spectacle carried out by the media – whether through radio, television or journalistic discourse, or through the editing of television images.

In this second case, another struggle takes place, unrelated to that which occurs at the sporting level: here, it is the fight for the scoop or the audience, the result of pressures that are sometimes greater than those faced by athletes on the playing field. game. In our case, the fight for audience and originality is what may have motivated, on another level, some newspapers analyzed to look for discursive options in which the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, appeared visually on the covers through some image or illustration – a resource not present in Brazilian printed journalism highlighted here.

In conclusion

The discursive formations that we sought to bring together in relation to the 16 covers of Brazilian and Portuguese newspapers in the face of Russian actions on Ukrainian soil in February 2022 reinforce the attempt to overcome what Mikhail Bakhtin called the “abstraction of expressive aspects” in contemporary printed journalism, in which the speaker’s subjectivity is sometimes masked to the extreme through a style that is intended to be “objective-neutral”. This style presupposes a kind of reading contract between the recipient and the speaker, a contract that would manifest itself at the cost of an unconscious refusal of expressiveness and in which several texts end up similar. It is no surprise that half of the newspaper covers gathered here composed a discursive formation that revolved around the concept of war declared by Russia due to the invasion and bombing of a neighboring country.

The most obvious thing about the events portrayed here would be to highlight the horror of war, with images of destruction and weapons. Therefore, it is not surprising that the concept

of war and other terms already listed here, such as threat, nuclear risk, conflict, pain, despair, invasion, bombing, among others, have been used by several newspapers to reconstruct the events of February 24, 2022.

In terms of some differences between Brazilian and Portuguese journalism in the face of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, it is worth noticing a greater adherence of Portuguese media outlets to the Ukrainian cause and have demonized Putin as largely responsible for the outbreak of war, a concept perceived in a somewhat unanimous way by public opinion, by Parliament and political forces in Portugal. For the Portuguese people, the feeling of “European belonging” and the idea that democracy and the Western order are being challenged by the Russian government weigh heavily here.

In the Brazilian case, although the discursive formation around the war appeared with a strong presence, it draws our attention, even surprisingly, the fact that O Estado de S. Paulo opted for a less incisive discursive formation in relation to Russia. Another discursive option was not to represent President Putin through imagery, contrary to the effects of meaning observed in Portuguese media. In terms of political issues and public opinion, there is no mobilization of the political class or parties in Brazil to allow Zelensky’s presence in the national Congress. As already mentioned at the beginning of this article, the Presidency of the Republic itself did not demonstrate support for the Ukrainian cause – quite the opposite (something highlighted in Brazilian newspapers by O Globo with the phrase “Brazil does not condemn invasion; Bolsonaro disallows his vice president”).

In conclusion, it should be said that our analytical exercise proposed in this article, instead of highlighting the oppositions between Foucault and Pêcheux around the conceptualization of discursive formation, sought to show which groupings of content (themes) and forms of utterance, as advocated by Foucault, predominated on the covers of Brazilian and Portuguese newspapers on February 25, 2022, one day after the Russian actions in Ukraine. At the same time, as Pêcheux defended, we ratify the idea that there is no neutral discourse: every discourse produces meanings that express the social, cultural and ideological positions of the subjects of language; therefore, it is necessary to have linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge to better understand the discourse, since without history there is no meaning, that is, it is the inscription of history in the language that makes it meaningful.

Discursive reconstruction, however, does not necessarily mean distortion of the object. The newspaper processes reality on the basis of subjective and dialogical interpretations, according to an interspeech that is also permeated by ideological issues, involving economic, political, cultural interests, and so on. Hence the effects between the speakers and the symbolic dimension of the facts, something that we wanted to highlight in this sense, using as an example a landmark of contemporary history, reconstructed from different discursive formations, although little contradictory.

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The author declares that the data supporting the research are included in the article and/or supplementary material.

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