READING AND PROCESSING A JOURNALISTIC TEXT THROUGH RELEVANCE THEORY: THE LARRY ROHTER CASE

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INTRODUCTION

According to J. Costa (in Silveira and Feltes, 1997), the linguistic theory has as its core issue the way meaning should be approached. It seems that explaining how readers interpret a linguistically complex text has been one of the main goals of Pragmatics, the area of linguistics that, as defined by Yule (2003), is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker/writer and interpreted by a listener/reader.

Since a single text might have a myriad of interpretations, how does the reader recognize which one is the one intended by the communicator? The media vehicles are of great importance when it comes to influencing and even manipulating their audience's opinion. This may be done by means of explicit stimuli or by implicit stimuli.

Attempts to interpret journalistic texts have been made under a great number of theoretical and ideological concepts. Silveira and Feltes (1997) argue that some of the theories of communication available allow us to understand the social processes that

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surround communication, but hardly suffice to explain how one derives the assumptions intended by the communicator in such texts.

As Costa (in Silveira and Feltes, 1997: 11) puts it, Relevance Theory, developed by D. Sperber and D. Wilson in their *Relevance: communication & cognition* (1986), might be one of the most interesting ways of approaching communicative meaning. Silveira and Feltes (1997) also agree that it seems to be an efficient analytical tool in the sense that it accounts for the "way information is represented in the mind and the way it is inferentially processed". (Silveira and Feltes, 1997: 14).

Sperber and Wilson propose in *Relevance* a model for information processing that is basically inferential and non-demonstrative, and spontaneously triggered by all human beings (Silveira and Feltes, 1997:13). This model is based on the characteristic humans have to turn their attention to the events that are more relevant to them.

In the present work, Relevance Theory will be used in the analysis of the article written by the North-American journalist Larry Rohter entitled *Brazilian Leader's Tippling Becomes National Concern*, and published in the *New York Times* on May 9, 2004. Applying this pragmatic-cognitive communicative model, the analysis will seek to interpret the possible intentions - manifest or not - the journalist had in mind when he wrote the article, and to demonstrate how readers fail or succeed to understand his intentions.

The choice of this article lies on the fact that it raised a national and international uproar in that it asserted that the Brazilian president, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, had drinking habits. Moreover, it supposedly indicated a national concern about the fact. By using ambiguity and photographs interpreted out of context, the journalist provoked a discussion that had been nonexistent until then. Citing Macagnan (2000), the relevance-theoretic account claims the pragmatic-cognitive processes to be of crucial importance in the interpretation of communicative acts and their cognitive effects, in that they help to recover explicit and implicit propositional content, illocutionary force[3], and to solve problems of ambiguity and figurative interpretations among others. Such cognitive effects are said to be highly context dependent, since different contextual assumptions may lead to different pragmatic interpretations.

This work will try to pinpoint the elements - explicit, subtle, or implicit - which might help readers to understand the different levels of meaning and

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[3] See Section 2 for further discussion.

interpretation of this single text. It is divided in three sections. The first section presents the theoretic account of Relevance theory. It provides an overview of the ostensive-inferential model, and focuses on some elements that are relevant to this work. The second section presents some relevant concepts in journalism and argues that Relevance Theory is a pertinent approach to understand how meaning and intention is recovered on the part of readers. The third section presents the analysis of the article in which such concepts are applied.

1. RELEVANCE THEORY

Wilson and Sperber (2004) assert that Relevance Theory (henceforth RT) has as its main goal that of developing one of Grice's central claims: "that the expression and recognition of intentions is an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal" (Grice 1989: Essays 1-7, 14, 18; Retrospective Epilogue). This claim sets the grounds for an inferential model of communication, which offers an alternative to the code model, much used in the theories of communication. Whereas in the code model, communication is the coding and decoding of a message by means of a system of symbols, in the inferential model, communication is a cognitive process in which "a communicator provides evidence of [their] intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by [their] audience on the basis of the evidence provided." (Wilson and Sperber, 2004:1).

Wilson and Sperber (2004) agree that, surely enough, an utterance is a linguistically coded piece of evidence, and therefore decoding is part of the comprehension process, but they add that it is only one of the many inputs one processes in the attempt to interpret the speaker's meaning. Sperber and Wilson (1995) say that while linguistic decoding applies to perceptual representations, there is a deductive processing of information that occurs and that applies to conceptual representations. These deductive rules are of major importance in the process of inference and construction of assumptions, which seem to be composed of a set of smaller constituents called concepts. Concepts perform the function of an address in the memory under which information may be stored and retrieved, and it may also "appear as a constituent of a logical form, to whose presence the deductive rule may be sensitive" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:86). Both functions of concepts are

complementary in the sense that "when the address of a certain concept appears in a logical form being processed, access is given to the various types of information stored in the memory at that address" (Sperber and Wilson. 1995:86). In a nutshell, such stored information may be accessed through a logical entry, which consists of a finite, small and constant set of deductive rules that apply to logical forms of which that concept is a constituent; an encyclopedic entry, which consists of information about the denotation of the concept – objects, events and /or properties that instantiate it; or a lexical entry, which contains syntactic and phonological information about the natural-language counterpart of the concept. Therefore, as Silveira and Feltes (1997) observe, retrieving the content of an utterance involves being able to identify the words and phrases it is composed of, recovering the concepts associated with these words and phrases, and applying the deductive rules to their logical entries. That being, the linguistic input and the deductive rules are closely related once a coded stimulus immediately activates a highly determined set of concepts, bringing them together under a logical form that could be used in the construction of assumptions (Macagnan, 2000).

In order to explain how hearers or readers infer the communicator's meaning, another of Grice's claims serves as a starting point: that utterances automatically create expectations which guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning. While Grice (1989: 368-72) considered these expectations as being resultant from a Co-operative Principle and Maxims of Quality (truthfulness), Quantity (informativeness), Relation (relevance) and Manner (clarity) which speakers are expected to observe, Wilson and Sperber (2004) consider the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance precise and predictable enough to guide the addressee towards the communicator's meaning. They add that the search for relevance is a basic human feature of cognition.

Any external stimulus – such as sight, sound, and utterances – or internal representations – such as thoughts, memories, assumptions, or conclusions of inferences – which provides an input to cognitive processes, can be relevant to an individual at a certain time. An input is relevant to an individual when it connects with some background information available that will enable worthwhile conclusions to be derived, that is, when this individual's representation of the world is altered. That is called a positive cognitive effect.

Wilson and Sperber argue that the most important type of cognitive effect achieved by processing an input in a context is a contextual implication, and they define

it as "a conclusion deducible from the input and the context together, but from neither input nor context alone" (Wilson and Sperber, 2004:4).

What makes an input worth picking from among many others is not only that it is relevant, but that it is *more* relevant than the others at that time, and that it will enable a greater number of positive cognitive effects to be achieved. Another aspect that influences the relevance of a given input to an individual is the effort employed in the cognitive process. The greater the effort one makes to derive an intended cognitive effect, the less rewarding this input is, and thus, the less relevant. It seems natural to conclude that if one employs greater processing effort it is because one expects to be rewarded with a greater number of worthwhile cognitive effects.

A communicator, then, knowing that it is a human cognitive tendency to pay attention to what seems to be most relevant in a piece of information and process it in the search of the best positive cognitive effects, might be able to produce a stimulus likely to draw their addressees' attention, prompt the retrieval of certain contextual assumptions, and guide them towards an intended conclusion. The clearer the communicator states their intentions, the more relevant it will be to their hearers, and the more likely it is that they will get their hearers' attention. This form of communication is called ostensive-inferential, and Sperber and Wilson define it as follows:

> The communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of his stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions {I}. (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:63)

One only engages in ostensive-inferential communication if they have their audience recognize they wanted to convey a set of assumptions and if they give evidence of their intentions; otherwise, even if the communicator wants to affect their audience's thoughts in some way, they will be merely exploiting the human natural cognitive tendency to maximize relevance. Ostensive-inferential communication consists, therefore, of two layers of intention: (1) the informative intention, which is the intention to inform an audience of something, and (2) the communicative intention, which is the intention to inform the audience of one's informative intention. According to Wilson and Sperber (2004), understanding is achieved when the communicative intention is fulfilled by the recognition of the informative intent (not necessarily its fulfillment - that would depend on how much the audience trusts the communicator),

hence, the communicative intention fulfilled. By using ostensive stimuli, the communicator raises the expectation that their gesture indicates that they think that there is something there worthy of attention and processing. This is the Cognitive Principle of Relevance. That leads to the Communicative Principle of Relevance, which claims that "every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 158). An ostensive stimulus, on its turn, is optimally relevant to an audience if "it is relevant enough to be worth the audience's processing effort", and if "it is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences" (Wilson and Sperber, 2004:12). The second claim is not a trivial one, especially for the purpose of this work, if one considers that there may be relevant information that would convey the communicator's intention more economically, but that they are *unwilling* or unable to produce. Given that, there could be ambiguities, ambivalences, ellipses, metaphors, ironies and other indeterminacies to interpret. Hearers and readers should enrich the meaning recovered through linguistic decoding with contextual assumptions that they, themselves, must supply. Below is the Relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure Wilson and Sperber (2004: 15) suggest:

> The hearer should take the linguistically encoded sentence meaning; following a path of least effort, he should enrich it at the explicit level and complement it at the implicit level until the (…) resulting interpretation meets his expectation of relevance.

Hearers should take the path of least effort because speakers are expected to make their utterance as easy to understand as possible; and they should stop at the first interpretation that satisfies their expectation of relevance because if speakers want their utterance to be as easy to understand as possible they should formulate them so that the first interpretation to satisfy the hearer's expectation of relevance agrees with the intended meaning. Silveira and Feltes (1997) argue that the effort engaged in the search for the optimally relevant utterance meaning vary from person to person. While one may be satisfied sooner, another may feel the urge to search further. "Since comprehension is a non-demonstrative inferential process, this hypothesis may well be false; but it is the best a rational hearer can do". (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 16)

The fact that contextual assumptions are added to the meaning recovered through linguistic decoding during the process of communication suggests that context is not established beforehand, and that mutual knowledge is not essential. Perna (2003:

45) cites Sperber and Wilson to say that "human communication is a result of a process of interaction between speakers and hearers who mutually alter their cognitive environments when processing their linguistic information". According to Sperber and Wilson (1995: 15), "context is a psychological construct, [which consists of] the hearer's assumptions about the world." It is then the hearer's beliefs about the world, rather than its actual state, that will help them derive the meaning of an utterance.

There are several subtasks a hearer must perform to recover the speaker's intended meaning. These subtasks do not happen in a sequence, but rather, parallel against a background of expectations. A notion that is essential in this process is that of explicature. Silveira and Feltes (1997) put it between linguistic decoding and contextual implication. It is the construction of "an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content via decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, and other pragmatic enrichment processes" (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 18).

The construction of hypotheses about what is not said – implicit – unfold into implicated premises and implicated conclusions. The first one is defined as the construction of "an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumptions" (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 18), which may be recovered through the logical, encyclopedic and lexical entries introduced above. The second one is defined as the construction of "an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications" (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 18).

Macagnan (2000) says that the basic distinction between the two concepts is that implicated premises are essential for the retrieval of any cognitive effect, and that implicated conclusions reveal such effects by means of deduction.

The next section of this work discusses some concepts related to journalism, and shows how pragmatics – and more specifically RT – can help explain the way information is processed in the recovering of the communicator's meaning and intention.

2. JOURNALISM AND PRAGMATICS

According to Chaparro (1994), journalism is in the field of Pragmatics, and it is there that it will find its essential theoretical grounds to be "thought, realized, understood and improved". (Chaparro, 1994: 15).

Every act of communication is a request for attention (Sperber and Wilson, 1995) and aims to achieve results (Chaparro, 1994). Being an article an ostensive-

inferential communicative act, that is, an ostensive piece of evidence of the communicator's informative intention, then it must have a purpose.

In his work, Chaparro (1994: 13) tries to answer among other questions how the purposes that motivate and the intentions that control the journalistic messages are manifest, implicit or dissimulated; and what influence the fact of intentions being made explicit or not might have on the reader. He adds that in journalism the actions and their context are highly complex, for it is a social and cultural process of mediation, with many producers of information and opinion and many receptors[4]. For him, the theoretical connection between journalism and Pragmatics lies on the recognition that language is not simply used to produce an utterance, but that this utterance is the performing of a social act.

Chaparro (1994) cites van Dijk (1983) when he says that the conditions for the success of the communicative acts are related to the knowledge, desires and obligations of the speakers. In other words, the recognition of the communicator's purposes in the part of the readers will depend on their knowledge of world affairs, speech event, co-text[5] and context. Chaparro (1994: 113) adds that the concept of success relates to the modification of a state into another. This seems to agree with Tanaka's (1994) identification of a communicator's goal. She says that changing one's thoughts is the ultimate goal of the communicator, and that the clearer they state their intentions, the more relevant it will be to their interpreters, and the more likely it is that they will get their interpreters' attention.

There are, however, instances in which the communicator has hidden intentions and will not use ostensive evidence to convey them. On the contrary, in order to avoid taking responsibility for the social consequences of certain implications that may arise, the communicator might prefer to use implicit communication. By using implicit communication, the communicator cannot be held totally responsible for the messages inferred by the addressee. On the other hand, optimal relevance cannot be guaranteed.

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[4] Chaparro (1994:18) uses the terms *emissores produtores* and *receptores usuários*.
[5] The co-text helps limit the meaning of words and sentences. Yule (2003) defines it as the linguistic environment in which a word is used.

This work thus aims to use RT to find elements that will make it possible to identify the many layers – explicit, implicit, masked, subtle, and ideological[6] – that meaning might have in articles, which, on their turn, might influence the way people see the world. It will be argued that RT is able to explain how interpreters recover implicit or explicit propositional content and illocutionary force. For the notion of propositional content, Stalkner´s definition (1998) for the term as "an intentional state, an abstract object that has truth conditions" is the one adopted here. He states it is what is thought dissociated and independent from the means used to express it and from the force with which it is expressed. Thus, the same propositional content can be expressed by different sentences in the same or different languages and can express a kind of illocutionary force in one context and other in another. That is, it can realize different functions *in* being expressed, such as assertion, prediction, promise, apology, etc. To illustrate these concepts let us consider the propositional content 'go to the movies'. If one says 'I'm going to the movies tonight.' the propositional content expresses the illocutionary force of making a statement. However, it could also express the illocutionary force of a refusal in the exchange below.

A: John Spencer is playing at Antone's tonight. Would you like to come with me?
B: Sorry, I'm going to the movies tonight.

If one says 'Are you going to the movies tonight?', it expresses the illocutionary force of a question. In 'Would you like to go to the movies tonight?', it is an invitation.

Melo (1994: 69) defines opinion as a device of ideological construct, which takes shape in journalistic processes through the selection of social happenings that are at the same time current and new, the essential elements of an article. According to him, the very fact of a journalist – or any opinion writer – choosing a subject over another makes manifest their opinion and point of view on that matter. Having that in mind helps the interpreter in the inferential process of propositional retrieval.

According to Marques (2003), language in a journalistic text should be the most objective, unbiased, unambiguous, clear and simple possible. Suppressing the use of first person singular or plural is one of the ways to achieve that. Avoiding imprecise

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[6] It should be pertinent to define ideology in the look of Marques (2003). He cites Boff (in Neotti, 1980) to say that it is a dissimulation of social reality, whose main function is to consciously (a lie) or unconsciously (an illusion) hide, mystify, mask, dissimulate social reality.

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reference, such as *some* and *most*, adjectives and hyperbole are also some cares that should be observed in writing a journalist text.

Another important aspect in a journalistic text is the title. Marques (2003) defines title as the announcement of the piece of news, which should focus on the fact that will most likely draw the reader's attention, and should never mention something which the text does not tackle. According to Melo (1994), the selection of a title reflects its author's point of view, and one could say it sums up not only what the text is about, but also what the author's intentions in producing that piece of writing are. In other words, it is an ostensive visual-linguistic piece of evidence of the communicator's intention. Therefore, interpreting an article's title is an important step in interpreting an article's meaning.

The next section presents the analysis in which the concepts presented so far are applied in the endeavor to demonstrate the cognitive-inferential process that takes place in the retrieving of the communicator's meaning.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

It has been mentioned in the previous section that titles of a journalistic text function as an ostensive stimulus from the part of the communicator, signaling that they have something to say and that they believe it to be worthy of the reader's attention. It is also in the title that the content and intentions of a text are stated.

Macagnan (2000) points out that the reading of a title may lead to a number of different hypotheses about the approach of the fact adopted by its writer, which may lead to different interpretations of the article's meaning. That is because such interpretations are derived based essentially on the reader's experiences, background information, beliefs, ideology, etc.

Rother selects from his personal experiences and values a title he finds is likely to draw his readers' interest and attention. By doing so, he is trying to guide readers towards his intended meaning. According to RT, that will be done in the part of readers through the search for best positive cognitive effects. Readers undergo this process by searching certain contextual assumptions, which will lead to a conclusion that satisfies their expectation of relevance. In this process of interpreting a text, context is crucial for the retrieval of the author's intended meaning. Having the title's visual linguistic input

as a starting point, readers will activate their encyclopedic memory in search of concepts to which they can apply the deductive rules, so as to come up with implicated premises. As it has been said in section 1, in order to recover a communicator's intended meaning, interpreters should enrich the meaning recovered through linguistic decoding with inferred contextual assumptions. That notion is termed explicature.

*Brazilian leader's tippling becomes national concern***.** This is the title selected by Rohter to draw the readers' attention. 'Brazilian leader' means the head of the national government, position that in the context in which the article was written is occupied by Luís Inácio Lula da Silva. The lexical entry 'tippling' might give the reader access to a definition such as 'to drink liquor especially by habit or to excess'. One might also access the information that this is an informal word, and could perhaps interpret it as having a facetious tone. 'Become' means 'to start to be', 'to come into existence', 'to undergo change or development'. This means that something that was not came to be. 'Concern' means 'an uneasy state of blended interest, uncertainty, and apprehension', and 'national' remits to a feeling of belonging, of natural ties that bring people together, that arises with the French Revolution and consolidates in the XIX century with the fusion of Nation and State[7] . Thus, the inferentially enriched linguistic decoding could generate the explicature 'Lula's continuous and excessive liquor drinking did not use to be reason for apprehension on the part of the citizens of Brazil, yet now it is'. Having the semantic representation complete, a reader may now derive the following contextual assumptions:

- Continuous and excessive liquor drinking is harmful to body and mind.
- People who drink continuously and excessively very often cannot carry out their assigned duties properly.
- The duties of a country's leader concern the whole nation.
    These could lead to the following contextual implications:
- If the country's leader drinks continuously and excessively, he might not be able to fulfill his duties.
- If he cannot fulfill his duties, that is a problem that concerns the whole nation.
    According to RT, an input might be relevant to different readers at different times.

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[7] Bobbio, N. (1999). *Dicionário de política*. Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 795.

Thus, while for some the verb chosen by the author of the article might pass unnoticed, for others it might serve as an ostensive stimulus, and context will be vital for the construction of implicated premises and therefore, implicated conclusions. By using the verb 'become' Larry Rohter escapes a problem he might have had, had he used the verb 'be' instead. 'Become' creates plausibility. So, a reader might think that even if they do not know what was said to be a fact, it might be because they ignored the fact, and not because the fact does not exist. The verb to be, on the other hand, is much more assertive and remits to a greater degree to the truthfulness of the fact.

Depending on their background information, that could be beliefs, ideology, sympathy, experience, knowledge of world affairs, etc., a reader might derive that Lula's drinking has indeed turned into a national concern (which would be a positive cognitive effect in the sense that it confirms something they believed to be true, or that presented new information), and conclude, then, that the title's – and therefore, the article's – meaning is that of calling Lula a drunkard. Lula's drinking seems to be the ostensive input provided by Rohter, so this conclusion appears to be a relevant one.

Another reader who might have different background knowledge of world affairs, however, might not find this a conclusion that satisfies their expectation of relevance, and so, will continue the search. By doing so, greater effort is employed in the cognitive process, but that would mean that this reader expects to be rewarded with a greater number of worthwhile cognitive effects, which could be to derive the article's implicit intention. Their background knowledge of world affairs, for instance, could lead them to think that Rohter's claim of Lula's drinking being a concern is untrue. Other information could be accessed as well in the process of hypotheses construction.

- Lula's victory in the 2002 national elections meant the first democratic victory of the left wing in Latin America after Allende, in 1970, in Chile.
- The left wing gains strength throughout Latin America after Lula's victory, and that means danger to until then dominant elites.
- Brazil presents economic growth in Lula's government and gathers international praise, especially concerning foreign policies.
- Lula's keeping most aspects of former president's economy model gave the government a political and economic stability, resulting in the lessening of "Brazil Risk", and removing from the opposition the expectancy of governability crisis, which would have been due in January 2004.

- Brazil is reluctant to support U.S. foreign policies, particularly those that call for the use of military force.
- Lula defends the strengthening of Mercosur in opposition to Alca, supported by the U.S.
- Lula supported Venezuela's leader Hugo Chávez, when a military coup, financially and intellectually supported by the U.S., tried to overthrow him in 2002.
- Brazil traditionally has strong political, economical, and cultural ties with Cuba.

Therefore, drawing from the input and the context together, some contextual implications might be derived.
- Saying that Lula's drinking is a national concern brings forth a discussion that was non-existent until then.
- Qualifying Lula's drinking as a concern weakens Lula's image.
- By weakening Lula's image, the nation's leader's image is weakened.

Finally, one could conclude that the title's meaning – and as a consequence, the article's meaning – is that of deconstructing at long term scales Lula's positive popular image.

Throughout the text, Rohter constructs the image of a neglecting, lazy, irresponsible, drunk president. However, at no point does he mention the alleged national concern the title brings, unless, of course, one considers Brizola, Diogo Mainardi, Cláudio Humberto (public people referred to in the article), and a reader the whole nation. One should remember from section 2 that a title should never mention something which the text does not approach. It seems, however, that Rohter repeats some words he used in the title, like 'concern', and 'national' or 'Brazilian', so as to create the idea of cohesion. These aspects are going to be discussed below, as well as the use of imprecise reference and adjectives.

In paragraph 2, Rohter says that "the president has often stayed out of the public eye and left his advisers to do most of the heavy lifting". Again contextual information is vital for the retrieval of propositional content. Depending on their background knowledge, a reader may access that:
- Lula has selected a very strong group to be part of the government.

- José Dirceu (Chief of Staff) and Antônio Palocci (Finance Minister) are indeed strong figures in the government, who have been standing out.
- Because of this strong group of support, Lula can preserve his image.

However, by choosing 'heavy lifting' Rohter is expressing his opinion that Lula has left his advisers to work while he can rest (or drink, perhaps). As shown above, it may follow from the title the assumption that alcohol may cause one to be unable to perform their duties. The sentence analyzed seems to reinforce this idea. With the sentence 'his apparent disengagement and passivity may somehow be related to his appetite for alcohol', Rohter uses ostensive linguistic input to tell his readers that that assumption is correct and that it applies to Lula. Surely enough, disengagement, passivity and laziness are not desired characteristics in a nation's leader. To support his point of view, Rohter uses Brizola's (leader of the Democratic Labor Party at the time) opinion on the matter. More than that, he qualifies at his own risk Brizola's opinion as a 'worry', a 'concern'. It should be pointed out that this 'worry', 'concern' is not the same one mentioned in the title. It is Brizola's concern, or Rohter's concern, not a national concern. Below are the excerpts:

(1) "One exception is Leonel Brizola, the leader of the leftist Democratic Labor Party, who was Mr. da Silva's running mate in the 1998 election but now *worries* that the president is *"destroying the neurons in his brain.""*

(2) "*During an interview in Rio de Janeiro in mid-April*, Mr. Brizola elaborated on the *concerns* he expressed to Mr. da Silva and which he said went unheeded."

Another topic that could be discussed here is the use of imprecise reference, which should be avoided in a journalistic text. If the sources are not correctly identified, readers cannot judge the weight of their opinion and information, nor the veracity of what was said. In excerpt 1 above, Rohter seems to quote Brizola, for he uses quotation marks, but fails to inform his readers when and where it was uttered. In excerpt 2 above, he mentions an interview, but fails to inform his readers the means in which the interview appeared. Was it on TV? What channel? What show? Was it a magazine? A newspaper? Which one? When? In excerpt 3 below, Rohter mentions a speech, but again fails to inform when and where such speech took place. Besides that, he puts in

Brizola's mouth another imprecise reference that cannot be verified by his readers. By using the passive mode, the agent of the 'saying' in "according to what is said" is suppressed. A reader may infer from these imprecise pieces of information that Rohter is unable or unwilling to provide ostensive stimuli.

(3) "When I was Lula's vice-presidential candidate, he drank a lot," Mr. Brizola, now a critic of the government, said in *a recent speech*. "I alerted him that distilled beverages are dangerous. But he didn't listen to me, and according to *what is said*, continues to drink."

Adjectives function as ostensive linguistic input of the communicator's opinions and intentions. Excerpts 4 and 5, which correspond respectively to paragraphs 5 and 6 in the text, bring some adjectives that could be discussed.

(4) "Though political leaders and journalists are increasingly talking among themselves about Mr. da Silva's consumption of liquor, few are *willing* to express their misgivings in public or on the record".

(5) "No, there's no danger, I've got it under control", Mr. Brizola, imitating the president's *gruff*, *raspy* voice, remembers Mr. da Silva replying then.

A reader may access from their encyclopedic memory concepts for the lexical entry 'willing', and in the context given attribute to it the meaning of 'done by choice, without reluctance'. 'Gruff voice', on its turn, means 'deep and rough, especially when the speaker is feeling annoyed or being rude', 'rough', 'brusque', 'low and unfriendly', lacking patience'.[8] 'Raspy' is used to describe 'a rough, loud, and often threatening sound'. It also means 'irritable', 'easily exasperated'. A reader might infer from these two paragraphs that political leaders and journalists are reluctant to express their feelings of doubt, uncertainty because of Lula's short temper. However odd this may sound, it seems to be what Rohter is trying to convey. This conclusion may not satisfy some reader's expectation of relevance, and in keeping with their search, they might

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[8] Definitions throughout this work, unless indicated otherwise, were taken from *Language Activator*. Longman, 1996; *International Dictionary of English*. Cambridge, 1996; and *Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary*. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 1993.

derive from the linguistic input and the context together the contextual implication that Rohter is saying that political leaders and journalists are reluctant to express their feelings of doubt, uncertainty because of Lula's authoritarian government.

Between paragraphs 8 and 15 in the text, the word 'Brazilian' appears five times, and the word 'national', one. That is, in 8 short paragraphs, there are six references to the concept of nation, that feeling of belonging defined by Bobbio (1999) previously. This repetition of the notion of nation may be an attempt to establish some kind of lexical cohesion with the title. None of them refers to the national concern mentioned in the title, though. Nonetheless, paragraph 12, which is reproduced in excerpt 6 below, puts 'Brazilian' and 'concern' together as if it had already been exposed that way.

(6) "Historically, *Brazilians* have reason to be *concerned* at any sign of heavy drinking by their presidents. Jânio Quadros, elected in 1960, was a notorious tippler who once boasted, "I drink because it's liquid"; his unexpected resignation, after less than a year in office during what was reported to be a marathon binge, initiated a period of political instability that led to a coup in 1964 and 20 years of a *harsh military dictatorship*."

By saying that 'Brazilians have reason to be concerned', Rohter seems to imply that he has already said that Brazilians are concerned. Well, he has, but only in the title. Nothing in his text so far mentions a national concern. Nevertheless, this piece of ostensive input may trick the reader into assuming that he has already provided evidence to that fact. Besides that, this paragraph connects Jânio Quadros's heavy drinking to 1964's coup and the military dictatorship. Without discussing the plausibility of such claim, it should be said that this paragraph serves many purposes. A reader might derive the contextual assumption that if Quadros's drinking led to political instability, which led to a military coup, which led to a dictatorship, the same thing could happen with Lula. Creating such reasoning could be the first purpose. In this sense, it also serves the purpose of creating a concern. In addition to that, 'harsh military dictatorship' might activate the concept of authoritarianism, which could reinforce the idea suggested with the adjectives highlighted in excerpts 4 and 5, discussed above. Paragraph 10 brings Diogo Mainardi's 'advice' to Lula, and what should be pointed out here is that it still does not approach the national concern. At the most, it approaches Mainardi's concern, if it can be called concern.

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Paragraph 13, reproduced in excerpt 7 below, is inconsistent with the title, and in that sense incoherent. While the title alleges a national concern, this paragraph says Lula's drinking could be speculation (a word Rohter himself uses two paragraphs ahead). It should be said again that a title should never mention something that is not covered in the text. In reading this, readers might wonder what the purpose of this little factual based, overlong text is.

(7) "*Whether or not Mr. da Silva really has a drinking problem*, the issue has seeped into the public consciousness and become the subject of *gibes*. When the government spent $56 million early this year to buy a new presidential plane, for instance, *the columnist Cláudio Humberto*, a sort of Matt Drudge of Brazilian politics, sponsored a *contest to give a tongue-in-cheek name* to the aircraft."

This paragraph also presents the third support to what has been said in the text, which should be that Lula's drinking is a national concern. It is hard to qualify, though, gibes and a contest to give a tongue-in-cheek name to an aircraft as concern. 'Gibes' could be defined as 'an insulting remark that is intended to make someone look stupid', and a 'tongue-in-cheek contest' is a joke contest. Yet again, it would be Humberto's concern, not a national concern. Evidence to his claim in the title that Lula's drinking has become a national concern has not yet been provided.

Paragraphs 15 to 17 tackles some blunders committed by Lula and connects them to Lula's drinking. A reader might interpret that Rohter's point in mentioning these blunders is that of implying that because of his drinking, Lula is embarrassing the nation. Evidence for this connection is not provided, nor evidence for the title's claim. As a matter of fact, Rohter finishes his text without providing evidence for his title choice. He once again, nonetheless, tries to depict Lula as a temperamental man, who may turn to violence. In paragraph 20, that is done with the association of Lula and his father, who was an "*alcoholic* who *abused* his children". Rohter could be exploiting here the popular belief that certain traits are passed down genetically, or that in general terms, people grow to be like their parents. In paragraph 21, Lula's depiction as a temperamental, explosive man is done with the reporting of a happening in which Lula was drunk and "got off the elevator at the wrong floor of the building where he lived at the time and tried to *batter down* the door of an apartment he mistakenly thought was his own (…)". The two concluding paragraphs use imprecise reference to back up what

he is arguing. The source he uses to support the battering-down episode is "politicians and journalists here, including some who are former residents of the building". To begin with, what is the deictic referent of 'here'? Is it Brazil? Brasília? Because he mentions in the beginning of the reporting that Lula was a member of Congress, it could be assumed that 'here' means Brasília. However, this text was written for the New York Times, therefore to a public that is little acquainted with Brazil's geography, and might not know that Congress is in Brasília. Could it be that by omitting where 'here' is, Rohter may be trying to make his readers assume that 'here' is Brazil, and with that create a back up for his claim in the title that Lula's drinking has become a 'national' concern? Then, saying that 'some' politicians have reported that is not precise enough. In paragraph, reproduced in excerpt 8 below, Rother quotes someone, but fails to inform his readers who this someone is, when the article mentioned was published, and who the author of the article is.

(8) "Under Lula, the caipirinha has become the national drink by presidential decree," the daily Folha de São Paulo said *last month in an article* about Mr. da Silva's association with alcohol and referring to a cocktail made with sugar-cane liquor."

The illustration that follows the article shows Lula holding up a glass of beer. It is an ostensive visual input that can be interpreted as evidence to Lula's drinking claim, but not to the fact that this is a national concern. Furthermore, the illustration is taken out of context. Rother, for instance, does not mention that Lula is at Oktoberfest, and that posing with a glass of beer in hand is expected from the nation's leader in such a situation.

What may be interpreted from the analysis of the text is that Rohter is depicting the image of a president that is a drunkard, and that for that reason he may fail to fulfill his duties, turn to violence, embarrass the country, unstable the economy. There is nothing, however, no evidence, that gives consistency to this. Apart from that, there is no evidence, whatsoever, for the claim that this habit has become a national concern. Since the text's title indicated that he would tackle a national concern, the fact that he did not might lead the reader to infer that his purpose in writing it was simply to lessen Lula's image. This conclusion might be derived on the part of a reader through the linguistic input provided by Rohter enriched at the explicit level and complemented at the implicit level with information that the reader must supply. Considering that RT

accounts for communication as an inferential non-demonstrative process, such conclusion may well be wrong.

In this section of analysis and discussion some aspects of the ostensive-inferential model of communication proposed by Sperber and Wilson in *Relevance* (1986, 1995) were applied and tested in the attempt to explain how readers fail or succeed in interpreting the communicator's meaning.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This work has aimed to demonstrate how the relevance-theoretic account is able to explain the cognitive processes that take place when readers interpret a journalistic text. Through the analysis of some ostensive linguistic inputs, this work attempted to show the path readers take in the interpretative process. It has been argued that Sperber and Wilson's model for information processing is based on the characteristic humans have of turning their focus of attention to inputs that are more relevant to them. Since communication seems to take place in order for one to alter the other's view of the world, the clearer the communicator states their intentions the more likely it is that they will get the addressee's attention. This is called ostensive-inferential communication. In order for ostensive-inferential communication to occur, it must be made mutually manifest to communicator and addressee by means of ostensive stimuli that the communicator wants to make manifest a set of assumptions. However, the communicator may be unable or unwilling to produce an optimally relevant stimulus. The greater the effort employed in the interpretive process, the less relevant the input that triggered such process is. It follows that an interpreter, choosing a path of least effort, enriches the encoded linguistic input both at explicit and implicit levels, and stops when the resulting interpretation satisfies their expectation of relevance. The input is optimally relevant when the first resulting interpretation satisfies the interpreter's expectation of relevance. If it does not, and interpreter continues their search, it is because they expect a greater number of positive cognitive effects. Context, background knowledge, beliefs, ideology, etc. are crucial in this cognitive-inferential process of meaning retrieval.

It has also been said that journalism is said to be in the field of pragmatics. It has been argued it is so because a journalistic text is an ostensive request for attention, signaling that the communicator thinks there is something there worthy of the reader's attention, and that will ultimately alter the reader's cognitive environment, that is, bring

positive cognitive effects. It is a social action. Two questions posed by Chaparro (1994) have been roughly reproduced.

(1) How are the journalistic texts' intentions manifest, hidden or dissimulated?
(2) What influence the fact of intentions being made explicit or not might have on the reader?

The analysis of the journalistic text conducted in this work might indicate that such intentions may be made more or less explicit by the choice of ostensive input (linguistic and visual in the case analyzed) provided in the title and throughout the text. The more ostensive the input is, the easier it is to process, the more relevant it is. The analysis of Rohter's text demonstrates that the ostensive input he provides could lead readers to assume that the text is about Lula's being a drunkard. However, context is fundamental in the processing of information, and the first interpretation this ostensive input might lead readers to, may not be satisfactory for some. These readers will continue the search for meaning until they derive an interpretation that satisfies their expectation of relevance, that is, satisfies their expectations created based on their background knowledge, beliefs, ideology, etc, and that will alter their cognitive environment.

It has also been said that a journalistic text should avoid imprecise reference and adjectives. Adjectives were very important in Rohter's text to convey his opinion and intention. The fact that he used so many imprecise references may also be relevant for some readers, and lead them to infer that if he used imprecise reference it was because he could not use precise references, either because he did not have them, or because such references did not exist.

Titles have also been said to be important in the journalistic text. They announce and summarize the text that follows. They should never mention something not discussed in the text. Interpreting the title should mean interpreting the text. Rohter's text presents an inconsistency between title and text. The title mentions something not discussed in the text. Rohter's title is relevant. It indicates that the article is going to be about a topic of public interest. However, he cannot support his claim. Instead, he goes on and on talking about things that are not of public interest, citing "speculations" with the intention to weaken Lula's image.

Brazilian Leader's Tippling Becomes National Concern

1. BRASÍLIA - Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has never hidden his fondness for a glass of beer, a shot of whiskey or, even better, a slug of cachaça, Brazil's potent sugar-cane liquor. But some of his countrymen have begun wondering if their president's predilection for strong drink is affecting his performance in office.

2. In recent months, Mr. da Silva's left-leaning government has been assailed by one crisis after another, ranging from a corruption scandal to the failure of crucial social programs. The president has often stayed out of the public eye and left his advisers to do most of the heavy lifting. That has spurred speculation that his apparent disengagement and passivity may somehow be related to his appetite for alcohol. His supporters, however, deny reports of heavy drinking.

3. Though political leaders and journalists are increasingly talking among themselves about Mr. da Silva's consumption of liquor, few are willing to express their misgivings in public or on the record. One exception is Leonel Brizola, the leader of the leftist Democratic Labor Party, who was Mr. da Silva's running mate in the 1998 election but now worries that the president is "destroying the neurons in his brain."

4. "When I was Lula's vice-presidential candidate, he drank a lot," Mr. Brizola, now a critic of the government, said in a recent speech. "I alerted him that distilled beverages are dangerous. But he didn't listen to me, and according to what is said, continues to drink."

5. During an interview in Rio de Janeiro in mid-April, Mr. Brizola elaborated on the concerns he expressed to Mr. da Silva and which he said went unheeded. "I told him 'Lula, I'm your friend and comrade, and you've got to get hold of this thing and control it,' " he recalled.

6. "No, there's no danger, I've got it under control", Mr. Brizola, imitating the president's gruff, raspy voice, remembers Mr. da Silva replying then. "He resisted, and he's resistant," Mr. Brizola continued. "But he had that problem. If I drank like him, I'd be fried."

7. Spokesmen for Mr. da Silva declined to discuss the president's drinking habits on the record, saying they would not dignify baseless charges with a formal reply. In a brief e-

mail message responding to a request for comment, they dismissed speculation that he drank to excess as "a mixture of prejudice, misinformation and bad faith."

8. Mr. da Silva, a 58-year-old former lathe operator, has shown himself to be a man of strong appetites and impulses, which contributes to his popular appeal. With a mixture of sympathy and amusement, Brazilians have watched his efforts to try not to smoke in public, his flirtations at public events with attractive actresses and his continuing battle to avoid the fatty foods that made his weight balloon shortly after he took office in January 2003.

9. Aside from Mr. Brizola, political leaders and the news media alike seem to prefer to deal in innuendo, but do so with relish. Whenever possible, the Brazilian press publishes photos of the president bleary-eyed or ruddy-faced, and constantly makes references both to weekend barbecues at the presidential residence at which the liquor flows freely and to state events at which Mr. da Silva never seems to be without a drink in his hand.

10. "I've got a piece of advice for Lula," the gadfly columnist Diogo Mainardi wrote in late March in *Veja*, the country's leading newsmagazine, reeling off a list of articles containing such references. "Stop drinking in public," he counseled, adding that the president has become "the biggest advertising spokesman for the spirits industry" with his very conspicuous consumption of alcohol.

11. A week later, the same magazine printed a letter from a reader worrying about "Lula's alcoholism" and its effect on the president's ability to govern. Though some Web sites have been complaining for months about "our alcoholic president," it was the first time the mainstream national press had referred to Mr. da Silva in that manner.

12. Historically, Brazilians have reason to be concerned at any sign of heavy drinking by their presidents. Jânio Quadros, elected in 1960, was a notorious tippler who once boasted, "I drink because it's liquid"; his unexpected resignation, after less than a year in office during what was reported to be a marathon binge, initiated a period of political instability that led to a coup in 1964 and 20 years of a harsh military dictatorship.

13. Whether or not Mr. da Silva really has a drinking problem, the issue has seeped into the public consciousness and become the subject of gibes. When the government spent $56 million early this year to buy a new presidential plane, for instance, the columnist Claudio Humberto, a sort of Matt Drudge of Brazilian politics, sponsored a contest to give a tongue-in-cheek name to the aircraft.

14. One winning entry, recalling that the United States president's plane is called Air Force One, suggested that Mr. da Silva's jet should be designated "Pirassununga 51,"

which is the name of the most popular brand of cachaça. Another suggestion was "Powered by Alcohol," a pun referring to a government plan to encourage cars to use ethanol as fuel.

15. Speculation about the president's drinking habits has been fed by various gaffes and faux pas that he has made in public. As a candidate, he once offended residents of a city regarded as a haven for gays by calling it "a factory that manufactures queers," and as president, his slips in public have continued and become part of Brazilian political folklore.

16. At a ceremony here in February to announce a large new investment, for example, Mr. da Silva twice referred to the president of General Motors, Richard Wagoner, as the president of Mercedes-Benz. In October, on a day honoring the nation's elderly, Mr. da Silva told them, "when you retire, don't stay at home bothering your family, find something to do."

17. Abroad, Mr. da Silva has also stumbled or spoken ill-advisedly. On a visit to the Middle East last year, he imitated an Arab accent in speaking Portuguese, mispronunciations and all; and in Windhoek, Namibia, he said the city seemed to be so clean that it "hardly seems like Africa."

18. Mr. da Silva's staff and supporters respond that such slips are only occasional, are to be expected from a man who likes to speak off the cuff and have nothing to do with his consumption of alcohol, which they describe as moderate in any case. As they see it, he is being held to a different and unfair standard than that of his predecessors because he is Brazil's first working-class president and received only a sixth-grade education.

19. "Anyone who has been at a formal or informal reception in Brasília has witnessed presidents sipping a shot of whiskey," the columnist Ali Kamel wrote in the Rio de Janeiro daily *O Globo* recently. "But you'll have read nothing in that respect about other presidents, just about Lula. That smacks of prejudice."

20. Mr. da Silva was born into a poor family in one of the country's poorest states and spent years leading labor unions, a famously hard-drinking environment. Brazilian press accounts have repeatedly described the president's father, Aristides, whom he barely knew and who died in 1978, as an alcoholic who abused his children.

21. Stories about drinking episodes involving Mr. da Silva are legion. After one night on the town when he was a member of Congress during the late 1980's, Mr. da Silva got off the elevator at the wrong floor of the building where he lived at the time and tried to batter down the door of an apartment he mistakenly thought was his own, according to

politicians and journalists here, including some who are former residents of the building.

22. "Under Lula, the *caipirinha* has become the national drink by presidential decree," the daily *Folha de São Paulo* said last month in an article about Mr. da Silva's association with alcohol and referring to a cocktail made with sugar-cane liquor.

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