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# Climate emergency in the Portuguese Parliament and in the media: a discursive approach

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**Abstract** The environment is ubiquitous in discourses of the public sphere in modern societies. Public discussions on this issue take place in parliaments, in scientific and activist forums, etc., and among policy-makers, but the media recontextualise the political discourse and try to influence political decisions. This paper focuses on environmental discourse, analysing the media treatment of the declaration of a climate emergency requested by some political parties in the Portuguese Parliament, in three Portuguese newspapers between 9 and 18 May 2019. It then compares this media treatment of the issue with a recent newspaper opinion article. The study adopts a discursive approach, aiming to identify the lexical transfer between the specialized discourse and the discourse of dissemination to the lay people, the modalisation operated by the journalist/mediator, the selection of the voices evoked, the articles' didacticity and some of the rhetorical strategies adopted to persuade the reader.

**Keywords** media; environmentalism; climate emergency; argumentation; didacticity.

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### **A emergência climática no parlamento português e nos media: uma abordagem discursiva**

**Resumo** O ambiente é omnipresente nos discursos da esfera pública nas sociedades hodiernas. A discussão pública sobre este tema tem lugar nos parlamentos, em fóruns científicos e ativistas, etc., e entre decisores políticos, mas os media recontextualizam o discurso político e tentam influenciar as decisões políticas. Este artigo focaliza-se no discurso ambiental, analisando o tratamento mediático da proposta de declaração de emergência climática realizada por vários partidos políticos no parlamento português, em três jornais nacionais, entre 9 e 18 de maio de 2019. Complementarmente, compara esse tratamento mediático do assunto com um artigo de opinião recentemente publicado num jornal. O estudo adota uma abordagem discursiva, com o objetivo de identificar transferências lexicais entre o discurso especializado e o discurso de disseminação para leigos, a modalização operada pelo jornalista/mediador, a seleção de vozes evocadas, a didaticidade e diversas estratégias retóricas adotadas para persuadir o leitor.

**Palavras-chave** media; ambientalismo; emergência climática; argumentação, didaticidade.

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## 1.

### Aim

The present study aims to analyse the coverage and media treatment of a parliamentary initiative of two Portuguese political parties which wanted the government to declare the state of “climatic emergency” in Portugal. This same state had already been declared in the UK (May 1, 2019) and in the Republic of Ireland (May 10, 2019). A draft resolution urging the Government to declare a “climate emergency” was delivered to the Portuguese Parliament on 9 May 2019, with a debate scheduled for 15 May.

This study surveys the newspaper articles published on the subject from May 9 to May 18 and analyses how newspapers transform gross events into media events, paying particular attention to (macro) textual organization and linguistic materiality.

In a subsequent moment, the study compares this media treatment with a recent opinion article published in a reference newspaper, aiming at identifying any recurrent features or any significant changes on the rhetoric that characterises the topic.

## 2.

### Theoretical background

#### 2.1. Constructivism

To achieve its objectives, this study takes a discursive approach to its object. This means adopting the same point of view that M. Halliday argues when he states the following:

the categories and concepts of our material existence are not ‘given’ to us prior to their expression in language. Rather, they are construed by language, at the intersection of the material with the symbolic. Grammar, in the sense of the syntax and vocabulary of a natural language, is thus a theory of human experience. It is also a principle of social action. In both these functions, or metafunctions, grammar creates the potential within which we act and enact our cultural being (Halliday, 2001: 179).

Other linguists agree with this claim. From this background, Alwin Fill (2002: 15) evokes the “ecoconstructivism of language”, which is “the way language construes the world in the ontological domain of life in an environment”. More recently, Qudsia Kalsoom, associating constructivism and sustainable development, wrote:

Constructivism is a theory of learning as well as a philosophical position, while sustainable development is an ideal to be achieved. Constructivism is rooted in the belief that “knowledge” is constructed by the people. It is not “fixed” and “out there.” Knowledge about the problems associated with sustainability should also be constructed (Kalsoom, 2019: 1).

While “constructivism” is a theory of learning in the field of educational psychology, involving the creation of conceptualizations by an active learner, “social constructivism” is a process of meaning construction through linguistic manipulation of reality, as Halliday argues. Kalsoom explains:

Social constructivism views “knowledge” as something socially constructed. Social constructivists believe that learning is the process of building internal representations of external structures.

These internal representations are influenced by one's beliefs, prior experiences, culture, interaction with others, and scaffolding (Kalsoom, 2019: 2).

This author also includes the role of language among the key principles of constructivism, following Hein (1991) and Doolittle and Hicks (2003): "Language is an important factor in meaning construction. The language we use influences our learning" (Kalsoom, 2019: 3).

Emphasising that constructivism is not a unified concept, Doolittle and Hicks claim that it uses a

flexible, culturally relativistic, and contemplative perspective, where knowledge is constructed based on personal and social experience. This relativistic perspective encompasses the belief that knowledge claims of truth, falsity, or viability are always dependent upon, or relative to, personal, cultural, or historical perspectives. (...) Therefore, constructivism involves the active creation and modification of thoughts, ideas, and understandings as the result of experiences that occur within socio-cultural contexts (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003: 76-77).

Social constructivism in particular, unlike radical constructivism or cognitive constructivism, emphasises the social nature of knowledge and leads to the recognition of the underlying role of language and shared discourses in the process.

## 2.2. Public discourse

All these claims are deeply relevant in the present case, since our object of study is related to knowledge about the environment and the legal framing that defines its place in the Portuguese social life. Knowledge about the environment is particularly sensitive to the issue of constructivism, as it is often built on "second hand" discourses circulating in the public sphere. Schäfer and Schlichting (2014: 142) agree with this view, claiming that "climate change is an "un-obtrusive" [...] issue that most people are unable to grasp first-hand"<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, environmental issues are hardly perceived by individuals, probably for two fundamental reasons: because they develop on a different (much longer) time scale from the scale of human life and vital experiences of individuals; and because human beings have a remarkable ability to adapt to new realities (Ramos, 2009, 2017). This ability is so important that Halliday even points out that humans seem to be ill-equipped to deal with the kind of changes that are currently occurring, responding well to sudden and/or catastrophic changes, but responding poorly to slow, gradual changes, "slow motion crisis" in Halliday's words (2001: 192).

The discourses about the environment that circulate in the public sphere then become publicly dominant discourses (Jung, 2001, Ramos & Carvalho, 2008). These are discourses in which the relationship between individuals and the environment is publicly defined (namely, in the media): "publicly dominant discourse [...] influences everyday communication, i.e. the speech, thoughts and opinions of every individual" (Jung, 2001: 272).

As for the media's treatment of the gross facts, we subscribe to Charaudeau's statement: "les médias ne transmettent pas ce qui se passe dans la réalité sociale, ils imposent ce qu'ils construisent de l'espace public" (Charaudeau, 1997: 9)<sup>2</sup>. In fact, the media event constitutes a treatment (an appropriation and a discoursivisation) of the gross event, which is susceptible to being grasped and understood by the recipients of informa-

1 This article offers "an overview by means of an empirical meta-analysis of studies on media portrayals of climate change" (Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014: 143).

2 "The media do not transmit what is happening in social reality, they impose what they build of public space".

tion. The media discourse thus implies the construction of a narrative about the world. As instances of social intervention, they focalise the attention of their recipients, revealing some segments of reality and simultaneously blurring others<sup>3</sup>.

### 3.

#### Corpus

The survey was conducted on three national newspapers: *Jornal de Notícias* (JN), a popular newspaper, and *Diário de Notícias* (DN) and *Público*, two reference newspapers. The selection of articles was made by researching the occurrence of the expression “climate emergency” in the three newspapers. In the first two cases, this research was carried out in the newspapers’ online pages; in the third case, in the print version. The observation period ran from 9 to 18 May 2019, as a draft resolution was delivered to the Portuguese Parliament recommending the government declare a “climate emergency” on 9 May and the discussion was scheduled for 15 May. Only the main body of each newspaper was considered; no dossier or joint magazine was analysed.

In JN, there are occurrences on three days, one article per day: 9, 15, and 17 of May.

In DN, there are occurrences on six days, in a total of nine articles: 9, 10, 10, 13, 14, 14, 15, 15, and 17 of May.

In *Público* there are occurrences on five days, in a total of seven articles: 10, 10, 12, 12, 15, 16, and 17 of May.

An analysis of an opinion article published on 2 May 2023 in the newspaper *Público* on the same subject completes the study.

### 4.

#### Findings

##### 4.1. Media coverage

Observation shows that all the selected newspapers covered the subject.

**4.1.1.** JN produced three articles on May 9, 15 and 17 (henceforth JN1, JN2 and JN3, respectively), all allocated in the “Home news” section, all accompanied by a photo that somehow illustrates or relates to the content of the text. None of these articles are signed by a journalist, suggesting that they are transcripts of news agency press releases, with some (slight) degree of adaptation. These are short texts: JN1 has 450 words; JN2 has 623 words; and JN3 has 516 words.

**4.1.2.** DN produced nine articles on May 9, 10, 13, 14, 15 and 17 (numbered sequentially from DN1 to DN9). Therefore, DN seems to have devoted more attention to the subject than JN, at least from a quantitative point of view. In addition, on the 10<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> the newspaper produced two articles per edition (DN2 and DN3, DN5 and DN6, and DN7 and DN8, respectively).

3 “Most people learn about it from the media, which constitute the main source of information about the issue for “lay” people as well as for stakeholders and decision-makers” (Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014: 143).

DN1, DN2, DN3, DN4, DN6, DN7, DN8, and DN9 are transcripts of press releases of the Portuguese news agency LUSA (with some adaptations) and are not signed by a journalist of this newspaper (454 words; 288 words; 408 words; 512 words; 661 words; 642 words; 545 words; and 521 words respectively). Only one (DN8) presents a photo illustrating the text.

DN5 is an article of 1372 words, signed by journalist Susete Henriques, including a photo related to the subject.

**4.1.3.** The daily *Público* published seven articles, on 10 (two articles), 12 (two articles), 15, 16, and 17 May, numbered sequentially from P1 to P7.

On the 10<sup>th</sup>, *Público* published an unsigned short note (P1, 32 words), referring to an attached dossier, not included in the corpus. On the same day, the newspaper issued another article (P2, 1029 words, with photo, on pages 14 and 15), allocated to the “Politics” section, signed by journalist Maria João Lopes.

On the 12<sup>th</sup>, the daily published a front-page title (P3) and an article on page 16 (P4, 757 words), allocated to the section “Society”, by journalist Ana Maia, with photo.

On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the newspaper published an opinion article by researcher and climate activist João Camargo, allocated to the section “Public Opinion” (P5, 710 words, on page 7). A photo of the author accompanies the text.

On the 16<sup>th</sup>, the daily published a short article (P6, 312 words, page 9), allocated to the “Politics” section, which appears to be a mere transcript of a LUSA press release (with possible adaptation). This article is not signed by a journalist, instead presenting the LUSA “signature”. There are no photos associated with the text.

Finally, on the 17<sup>th</sup>, *Público* published an opinion article by economist and Professor Susana Peralta, PhD, in the section “Public Opinion” (P7, 848 words, on page 6). A photo of the author accompanies the text.

**4.1.4.** A brief analysis of media coverage suggests that, among the corpus, *Público* is the newspaper which pays most attention and gives greatest emphasis to the “declare climate emergency” subject. From a quantitative point of view, this diary is not the newspaper that keeps the subject in the public sphere with the highest intensity (this place is occupied by DN), but it is the one that presents the greatest variability of types of articles and social actors that talk about the subject. This newspaper includes the subject on a front page (P3) and is the only one that offers space for the expression of the opinions of scientists and activists (as authors). On average, its articles are considerably longer than the other newspaper articles analysed. If we want to interpret these observations in the light of what has been said above about linguistic constructivism, we will see that *Público* plays a very important role in the construction of the theme of “climate emergency”, due to the quantity, permanence and heterogeneity of text types and social actors involved in its construction.

DN adopts a hybrid approach: mostly relying on transcribing the press releases from LUSA agency in most editions during that period, with little investment in generating its information and without featuring any photos. However, it keeps the issue in the public sphere almost daily in the defined period of time. The newspaper presents an extensive article (DN5) produced by an internal journalist.

JN, the tabloid, merely transcribes brief press releases received from news agencies and attaches non-permanent and very limited visibility to the subject over the defined period. Articles can be read quickly, they have a simple and linear structure, and offer superficial and easily grasped information. They intersperse the voice of the journalist and the voices of the political actors, with many segments of direct speech and they all consist of a title, a lead, and the body of the article. Thus, JN tends to construct a superficial, easy to understand if not problematised, oversimplified view of the “climate emergency” problem.

## 4.2. Enunciation and textual organization

**4.2.1.** All JN articles are presented as objectified enunciation texts (Moirand, 1999): the marks of the enunciator are hidden and the texts are presented as neutral and objective accounts of events and/or reported speech, with an external and non-engaged focus. Their textual structure is mainly narrative, although they convey a certain argumentative construction.

From an enunciative point of view, they are composed essentially as reported discourse of social actors: members of political parties (JN1 and JN2) and young environmental activists (JN3). The articles hide the presence of the journalist, who performs the function of giving voice to the most relevant social actors. In no case is the choice of those voices justified nor is there any exercise of counter-discourse by the journalist. The articles do not show the questions asked by the journalist to his interlocutors that led them to verbalize the information conveyed.

The rationale for the declaration of “climate emergency” is presented in JN1 by transcribing excerpts from a political party press release PAN – Pessoas, Animais, Natureza [PAN – People, Animals, Nature]. This political party submitted a draft resolution to Parliament which recommended that the government declare a state of “climate emergency” and take steps to ensure carbon neutrality by 2030. Thus, the newspaper acts as a vehicle for spreading the message of a political party, without questioning them further.

The PAN press release is shaped by typical characteristics of environmental discourse (Ramos, 2011a, 2011b, 2017): the evocation of commonly adopted ethics and values; discourse dramatization by presenting strongly dysphoric scenarios; top-down imposing dimension of everyday behaviours; reconciling ecology and economy by creating new jobs in a “green economy”; the desire to build a future with a higher quality of life for all people.

The response to the demand for the declaration of “climate emergency” arises in JN2, when the newspaper transcribes the Minister of Environment’s speech, justifying the non-declaration. Thus, the contradiction does not occur by direct action of the journalist, who does not question his interlocutors, but by the opposition of discourses produced by different social actors (politicians). In this case, the Minister claims that the declaration would be inconsequential, devaluing its implications and claiming that Portugal already has plans to go beyond the objectives contained in the declarations of other countries. The article also includes other voices from other politicians, with divergent argumentative orientations. It is thus built on the friction of dissonant voices.

In JN3, young students are given a voice when they are preparing to hold a vigil on the environment. Once again, the article consists of segments of direct discourse of activists and there is no inquiry by the journalist.

From the analysis of the articles published by JN, it can be concluded that the environmental concerns and the concrete issue of the declaration of “climate emergency” is subjugated by the scenario of political struggle. The possible benefit from the declaration of “climate emergency” is not fully explained, nor are its arguments expounded in an impartial and uncompromising manner; nor is the opposite argumentative movement made from a disengaged explanation with an external point of view. The newspaper merely gives voice to different politicians and social agents, in an uncritical way, without justifying their relevance, without validating the relative weight of the arguments listed. Environmental issues are portrayed (or constructed) as controversial and as instruments of the power struggle between divergent political views. Ultimately, everything is restricted to the scope of discursive action, with no other practical repercussions on the daily life of citizens. To a certain extent, environmental issues are presented as closer to young people than to other citizens, forming a fracturing flag of age.



**4.2.2.** The articles in DN closely resemble those in JN: they are publications of press releases from the news agency LUSA. In fact, three of them originate from the same press releases that gave rise to JN articles (DN1, DN7, and DN9). The articles are framed as objectified enunciation texts and are predominantly organized as consecutive sequences of quotations from political and social agents. They subject climate issues to partisan struggle and constitute themselves as an agonistic space for discourse struggle. They collaborate to frame environmental issues as foodstuff for power fights.

However, the article DN5 departs from this scenario. This article is signed by a journalist, it is clearly longer than all other DN articles and is more complex in structure and content. It includes a title, a lead and an article body divided by three intermediate titles.

Like the other DN articles, this one is also an objectified enunciation article, built on reported discourse (in direct discourse and indirect discourse) by various speakers, but also on content under the journalist's enunciative responsibility. In this way, DN disseminates information that allows the reader to understand some of the consequences of the declaration of "climate emergency", as the proposing parties frame it:

(1) "Declaring this state of emergency is like slapping the table and saying enough, **we have to speed up. Otherwise it will be too late**", warns Cristina Rodrigues, from the National Political Commission of the PAN, in statements to DN. For this party, the advantage in recognizing that we are in a state of urgency "is the general alert for society and the political class" that we must act now so that the situation does not become irreversible. If the declaration of a state of climate emergency is adopted in Portugal there will be a "greater decision-making responsibility" to address the impacts of climate change, but also "greater ambition in achieving the stipulated goals", which must be anticipated, claims PAN, whose parliamentary deputy is André Silva (DN5, May 14<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>4</sup>.

The article ends up summarizing the overall purpose of the declaration of "climate emergency" in one paragraph, quoting a political party:

(2) Living in a state of climate emergency is, **in essence, "accelerating all investment in all transition processes, which everyone generally recognizes are necessary but have been delayed, are being thrown at goals too far away in time"**, claims BE [Left Block] (DN5, May 14<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>5</sup>.

This example demonstrates the influence of language in shaping our reality. An illocutionary act, such as a declaration, can impose obligations and result in specific physical actions. Even so, the article does not focus on the specific consequences of the declaration of "climate emergency", beyond the objective of anticipating the transition processes. Thus, the actual informational contribution of the article will still be limited as far as it regards the construction of readers' knowledge.

4 Portuguese version: "“Declararmos este estado de emergência é como que bater com a mão na mesa e dizer que já chega, **temos que acelerar o passo. Caso contrário será tarde demais**”, avisa Cristina Rodrigues, da Comissão Política Nacional do PAN, em declarações ao DN. Para o partido, a vantagem em reconhecer que estamos num estado de urgência “é o alerta geral para a sociedade e para a classe política” de que temos de agir já para que a situação não se torne irreversível.

Caso a declaração de estado de emergência climática seja adotada em Portugal passa a existir uma “maior responsabilidade na tomada de decisões” para colmatar os impactos das alterações climáticas, mas também “uma maior ambição na concretização das metas estipuladas”, que devem ser antecipadas, defende o PAN cujo deputado parlamentar é André Silva”. In all the examples, the emphasis was introduced by us.

5 Portuguese version: “Viver num estado de emergência climática é, **no fundo, “acelerar todo o investimento de todos os processos de transição, que genericamente toda a gente reconhece que são necessários, mas que têm vindo a ser protelados, vão sendo atirados para metas demasiadamente longe em termos temporais”**, considera o BE [Bloco de Esquerda]”



**4.2.3.** In *Público*, one of the articles (P1) is a note referring to an article in a dossier attached to the newspaper and not included in the corpus of analysis for this study; another is a title on the front page with a brief summary referring to the corresponding article (P3); these texts are not particularly interesting for the present analysis.

The article P2, published on May 10<sup>th</sup>, portrays a campaign action for the European Parliament. Six young people interview candidates for these elections. The possibility of the government declaring a state of “climate emergency” emerges as one of the possibilities for the evolution of the struggle for better environmental conditions at national and European level. The article gives the theme some relief, but not a specific focus. Readers will hardly build relevant knowledge on the subject, besides framing it globally in environmental issues – and associating it with youth.

Published in the May 12<sup>th</sup> issue, article P4 presents itself as more complex and more productive than those preceding it in building readers’ knowledge of the proposed “climate emergency” declaration.

The article gives visibility to the political party struggle, listing concrete proposals from the parties without showing the need to justify environmental measures. It validates the position of those who claim the declaration of “climate emergency” by reproducing their catastrophic speech:

(3) “Each passing year is a new champion in CO2 emissions. We have the US –the largest producer of emissions– leaving the Paris Accord, deforestation in Brazil, the recent reports on ecosystem and biodiversity, rising temperatures and recurring disasters. But we also have worldwide social mobilization that has gained a great awareness of what is happening with the growth in emissions. They realize the chasm we are walking on and ask for concrete measures that we also think should be carried out. And in order to do so, we must have an exceptional state”, argues Maria Manuel Rola (P4, May 12<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>6</sup>.

The article includes some explanatory segments, with semantic reformulation, such as the following, which explains a technical term to the lay reader:

(4) [...] carbon neutrality (the level of emissions must be equal to what the earth can absorb) (P4, May 12<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>7</sup>.

There are also some additional explanations about the possible implications of the “climate emergency” declaration:

(5) The representative gives other examples of measures that she considers essential to implement this climate sustainability movement: dialogue with other national and international sovereignty bodies, migration to renewable energy taking into account the ecosystem and the needs of the population, an economy with more solidarity and a greater focus on means of public transport (P4, May 12<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>8</sup>.

6 Portuguese version: “Cada ano que passa é o campeão das emissões de CO2. Temos os EUA –maior produtor de emissões– a sair do Acordo de Paris, a desflorestação no Brasil, os relatórios recentes sobre o ecossistema e a biodiversidade, o aumento da temperatura e catástrofes recorrentes. Mas temos também uma mobilização social a nível mundial que tem ganho uma grande consciência em relação ao que se passa com o crescimento das emissões. Percebem o abismo para que estamos a caminhar e pedem medidas concretas que nós também achamos que devem ser levadas a cabo. E, para o fazermos, temos de ter um estado de excepção”, defende Maria Manuel Rola”.

7 Portuguese version: “[...] neutralidade carbónica (o nível de emissões deve ser igual àquele que a terra consegue absorver)”.

8 Portuguese version: “A deputada dá outros exemplos de medidas que considera essenciais para pôr em prática este movimento de sustentabilidade climática: o diálogo com outros órgãos de soberania nacional e internacional, a migração para as energias renováveis tendo em conta o ecossistema e as necessidades da população, uma economia mais solidária e uma maior aposta nos meios de transportes públicos colectivos”.

Articles P5 and P7 are opinion texts produced for the newspaper by outside contributors. Their status as scientists gives them a prominent role.

In the case of Article P7, the reference to the declaration of “climate emergency” emerges episodically as an example of a theme to which young people are particularly sensitive.

In the case of Article P5, the title itself announces the centrality of the subject:

(6) State of climate emergency (P5, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>9</sup>.

As in other articles, the author also assumes that the declaration of “climate emergency” is a symbolic gesture and may imply profound changes in Portuguese society or none at all.

The article traces a strongly catastrophic scenario of the environmental state of the world and the action of western model societies:

(7) [...] we are in the 6th mass extinction of species, we have entered a new geological age, there is a migratory crisis that causes tens of millions of people to move around the world because territories can no longer sustain populations. These sequences are becoming normal: climate change, more natural disasters, erratic weather, falling agricultural production, rising poverty, migration to urban areas, increased pressure on regions and states, reduced productivity and tax revenue, decreased ability of states to cope with increasing demands and, in certain circumstances, collective violence to the point of collapse (P5, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, the article reiterates a generally recognized discourse, framing the issue. It evokes and gives meaning (a certain meaning) of the currently observable climate phenomena. It also evokes some social changes and presents them as consequences of the former. Again, these are examples of “linguistic constructivism”: through referencing, necessarily an apprehension of reality and not reality itself, the reader is offered a version of the world.

The frame it creates is overwhelming, perhaps too overwhelming to be credible<sup>11</sup>. However, the author seeks to create cause-effect relationships between climate change, observable natural phenomena and equally observable social phenomena. These phenomena are hardly perceived by potential readers of the newspaper, but they are known to them through the media.

The article ends with a non-binding directive illocutionary act of appeal, with its strength intensified by the evocation of ethical and survival criteria, using the inclusive plural that brings together author and readers; it employs the deontic modality resulting from the use of the verb “precisar”/“to need” (twice):

9 Portuguese version: “Estado de Emergência Climática”.

10 Portuguese version: “[...] estamos na 6.ª extinção em massa de espécies, entrámos numa nova era geológica, há uma crise migratória que leva dezenas milhões de pessoas a mover-se por todo o mundo porque os territórios deixam de conseguir sustentar populações. São sequências que se vão tornando normais: alterações climáticas, mais desastres naturais, meteorologia errática, queda da produção agrícola, aumento da pobreza, migração para as zonas urbanas, aumento de pressão nas regiões e Estados, redução da produtividade e receita fiscal, decréscimo de capacidade dos Estados de enfrentarem exigências crescentes e, em certas circunstâncias, violência colectiva até ao colapso”.

11 Foust and Murphy argue that apocalyptic rhetoric can be counterproductive as it puts the changes the world will suffer beyond any possibility of human control: “apocalyptic rhetoric, we argue, represents a mediating frame in global warming discourse. Certain versions of this frame may stifle individual and collective agency, due to their persistent placement of “natural” events as catastrophic, inevitable, and outside of “human” control” (Foust & Murphy, 2009: 153).

(8) **We need** to stop **pretending** that there are no climate policies in Portugal, the EU and the world. There are policies and laws that encourage more emissions, more climate change, more global warming (...). If it [the climate emergency declaration] passes, **we need** that statement to achieve something, starting with tearing down the laws that favour climate collapse and moving towards a political programme that begins to create social and natural balance (P5, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>12</sup>.

The article develops a strong critique of political powers, but also of society as a whole. The use of the verb “finger”/“to pretend” in excerpt 8 is a serious charge. Thus, the article presents itself as an alert, founded on the “truth”, denouncing the “pretence” under which the world lives.

Finally, article P6, published by *Público* on May 16, is a transcript of a press release from the LUSA agency, similar to what JN and DN did and has been reviewed.

### 4.3. Environmentalism, didacticity and media

Press discourse is characterized by what Moirand (1992) designates as “weak didacticity”. In this scenario and when environmental discourse is concerned, science is often present, providing vocabulary, concepts and textual modes of organization (Beacco *et al.*, 2002; Ramos & Carvalho, 2008; Ramos, 2011b).

JN and DN articles, essentially linear and elementary narrative texts, seem little affected by didactic marks. Still, they transfer to the public sphere and to unspecialized discourse terms and concepts that are originally from the sphere of science: “CO2”, “carbon neutrality”, “greenhouse gases”, “hydrocarbons”, “anthropogenic”, among others. In some cases, these terms are reformulated, as in the following examples:

(9) (...) where there was a greater reduction in CO2 [carbon dioxide] emissions (DN4, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>13</sup>.

(10) COP 24 [United Nations Climate Summit] (DN5, May 14<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>14</sup>.

In three articles, all of them built on the same press release from the LUSA agency, an Anglicism is found, with its translation/reformulation in Portuguese:

(11) natural gas from “fracking” [hydraulic fracturing] (DN7, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2019; JN2, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2019; P6, May 16<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>15</sup>.

Exact quantifications and “number games” (van Dijk, 1988) are also present: several articles refer to “1.5°C” without explaining exactly what this means. However, in cases such as DN5, the explanation is provided:

(12) “It is urgent to halt emissions to ensure that we reach carbon neutrality by 2030 and that the global average temperature does not rise more than 1.5° C, above which extreme climate events will be more unpredictable and intense,” warns PAN (DN5, May 14<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>16</sup>.

12 Portuguese version: “**Precisamos** parar de  **fingir** que não há políticas climáticas em Portugal, na UE e no mundo. Há políticas e leis que incentivam mais emissões, mais alterações climáticas, mais aquecimento global (...). Se for aprovada [a declaração de emergência climática], **precisamos** que essa declaração sirva para alguma coisa, começando por rasgar as leis que favorecem o colapso climático e seguindo para a um programa político que comece a criar equilíbrio social e natural”.

13 Portuguese version: “[...] onde houve uma maior redução das emissões de CO2 [dióxido de carbono]”.

14 Portuguese version: “(10) COP 24 [Cimeira do Clima das Nações Unidas]”.

15 Portuguese version: “gás natural de ‘fracking’ [fratura hidráulica]”.

16 Portuguese version: “É urgente travar emissões para garantir que atingimos a neutralidade carbónica em 2030 e que a temperatura média global não aumente acima dos 1,5° C, **acima do qual os fenómenos climáticos extremos serão mais imprevisíveis e intensos**”, alerta o PAN”.

The articles present other quantifications and exact quantities, not always providing adequate framing, in order to allow the apprehension of their effective meaning: “6.5% of the world Gross Domestic Product” (JN2 / DN7), “289 billion euros” (JN2), “plus 100 million tons of carbon dioxide” (JN2 / DN7).

The evocation of the discourse of science also includes quoting scientists, which constitutes a way of making the discourse credible:

(13) Anticipating measures to combat climate change is crucial, not least because it meets the alert issued by **UN experts** who said last year that “we must reverse the situation in the next 12 years,” recalls Pedro Soares. **According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** (IPCC), the planet has only six years to prevent global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius above which the risk of extreme phenomena such as droughts, floods and peaks in heat rises dramatically (DN5, May 14<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>17</sup>.

The opinion piece written by researcher and activist João Camargo, published in *Público* on May 15, provides a clear example of how the way that experts organize their discussions can conflict with the way that journalists organize their stories.

Regarding the article’s structure, the opinion text written by researcher and activist João Camargo, published in *Público* on May 15, provides an eloquent example of how the mode of organization for peer discourse can interfere with the mode of organization of discourse in the media:

(14) Increasing the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is a political issue. We have been aware of the greenhouse effect since 1824 (Fourier), we know the direction in which changes in atmospheric gas concentrations have caused temperature changes since 1859 (Tyndall) and we have predicted global warming by doubling carbon dioxide since 1896 (Arrhenius). It’s simple: more molecules in the atmosphere absorb more solar radiation, which manifests itself in more energy in the form of heat (P5, May 16<sup>th</sup> 2019)<sup>18</sup>.

Not only is the organization of the discourse typical of science, with the evocation of authors who confer the necessary credibility on what is stated, but the synthetic way of referencing these authors is equally characteristic of the discourse of science. Moreover, the chronological logic and, above all, the positivist reasoning of the cause-effect relationship that underlies this statement are characteristic of the discursive organization of scientific texts.

17 Portuguese version: “Antecipar as medidas de combate às alterações climáticas é fundamental, até porque vai ao encontro do alerta lançado por **especialistas da ONU** que, no ano passado, disseram que “temos de inverter a situação nos próximos 12 anos”, lembra Pedro Soares. Segundo o **Painel Intergovernamental para as Alterações Climáticas** (IPCC, em inglês), o planeta tem apenas meia dúzia de anos para evitar um aquecimento global de 1,5 graus celsius a partir do qual o risco de fenómenos extremos como secas, inundações e picos de calor sobe de forma drástica”.

18 Portuguese version: “O aumento da concentração de dióxido de carbono na atmosfera é uma questão política. Conhecemos o efeito de estufa desde 1824 (Fourier), sabemos o sentido que as mudanças das concentrações de gases atmosféricos provocam na variação de temperatura desde 1859 (Tyndall) e temos uma previsão do aquecimento global pela duplicação do dióxido de carbono desde 1896 (Arrhenius). É simples: mais moléculas na atmosfera absorvem mais radiação solar, que se manifesta em mais energia sob a forma de calor”.

## 5.

### The opinion article

Several years after the period mentioned above, *Público* published an opinion piece on the same subject on 2 June 2023 (codenamed P8). We don't claim, of course, that this was the only text published by the newspaper on this subject since 2019. But this piece

- a) serves as a reference for an analysis with some temporal distance from the first moment we analysed;
- b) is an opinion article, so it differs from many of the other texts in terms of text type;
- c) is an article written by an occasional contributor from outside the paper. It is therefore not (at least not directly) the position of "the newsroom". This means that it might differ from the articles collected in the previous period;
- d) was taken from the newspaper that had covered the issue in greater depth in the previous period. This justifies a return to the same medium.

The article consists of 593 words and is signed by Graça Castanheira, who identifies herself as a "film director". Below the title is the author's photograph and name, a typical visuodiscursive marker of a subjectivised enunciation text.

The lexeme "protopia" appears between the photograph and the author's name, in italics and in a different font and colour. It is a neologism that is close to the already used lexemes "utopia" and "dystopia", but which, unlike them, does not attempt to project visions of perfect or imperfect future societies. Rather, it seeks to reflect on the future of human social organisations.

This article aims at persuading the reader to share the enunciator's position. To accomplish its objective, the text utilises various argumentative strategies, the significant ones of which are highlighted as follows.

#### 5.1.

It creates an intensely negative, even catastrophic scenario as an argument to justify the action it demands. The linguistic manifestations of this extreme state of affairs can be found in the title ("Exceptional seriousness") and in the body of the text: in its fourth paragraph, we find the statement "We are living in times of radical emergency". Creating extreme scenarios is one of the characteristics of environmentalism, also identified in the remaining corpus analysed (see section 4.2.3).

#### 5.2.

The fact that the title consists of a nominal phrase suggests that the enunciator considers the state of affairs to be peaceful (fully accepted by both enunciator and addressee) - the aforementioned state of "exceptional seriousness". This use corresponds to an evocation of a shared state of affairs, rather than an assertion made by the speaker and potentially subject to challenge by the reader. This strategy of creating complicity between the enunciator and the recipient is strongly reinforced in the first two paragraphs of the article. Four times we find the verbs "saber" and "conhecer", both translated as "to know", evoking the state of affairs claimed by science and environmental activists. These states of affairs are configured as strong arguments, oriented towards the conclusion that the author verbalises in the fourth paragraph: "we must assume a state of global climate emergency".

The insistent use of the first person plural reinforces the effect of sharing and complicity between the enunciator and the recipient – the same strategy that we can see in extracts (7) and (8):

(15) **We** already **know** that climate change is real and that human activity is the main cause. **We** also **know** that the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is directly linked to the average global temperature and that carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is largely the product of burning fossil fuels. **We know** that the main component of natural gas, methane, is responsible for more than 25 per cent of current warming and that it is a pollutant with a global warming potential 80 times greater than CO<sub>2</sub> over the 20 years following its release into the atmosphere.

**We know** the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit warming to a maximum of 1.5 degrees. (P8, July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023)<sup>19</sup>.

### 5.3.

As was observed in the 2019 set of articles, technical vocabulary appears in the 2023 text. Extract (15) above illustrates this. However, it can be said that this vocabulary has already slipped into the non-technical register and is familiar to the lay reader because it is used so frequently. It is part of the environmental interdiscourse that pervades the public discourses of all developed societies (and beyond).

Still, the text under analysis presents the reader with another challenge: a set of mathematical calculations, which the enunciator proposes and the reader must follow. These are not easy calculations, but they give the text a scientific flavour, reinforcing its credibility.

This observation suggests that the virtual reader configured by the author of the article will have relevant intellectual competences, of the kind obtained through significant schooling.

Another strategy to give credibility to the text and its enunciator lies in the evocation of external authorities to support the arguments:

(16) We are living in times of radical emergency: **all the scientific evidence, all the reports, all the human intelligence tells us so**. This is also what **young activists** are shouting at us: we must assume a state of global climate emergency. They are demanding it in movements like **Greenpeace** or **Fridays for the Future**. There is already talk of a climate emergency, but we refuse to leave our comfort zone, as if “emergency” doesn’t mean exactly that: “an event of exceptional severity requiring immediate or urgent (re)action” (P8, July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023)<sup>20</sup>.

19 Portuguese version: “Já sabemos que a mudança climática é real e que a atividade humana é a sua principal causa. Também sabemos que a concentração de gases de efeito de estufa na atmosfera está diretamente ligada à temperatura média global e que o dióxido de carbono (CO<sub>2</sub>) resulta em grande parte do produto da queima de combustíveis fósseis. Sabe-se que o principal componente do gás natural, o metano, é responsável por mais de 25% do aquecimento atual e que é um poluente com um potencial de aquecimento global 80 vezes maior do que o CO<sub>2</sub> durante os 20 anos que se seguem à sua libertação na atmosfera. Conhecemos o Acordo de Paris, que estipula um aquecimento máximo de 1,5 graus de aquecimento”.

20 Portuguese version: “Vivemos tempos de uma emergência radical: toda a prova científica, todos os relatórios, toda a inteligência humana nos dizem isso mesmo. É também o que os jovens ativistas nos estão a gritar: é preciso assumir o estado de emergência climática global. Exigem-no em movimentos como a Greenpeace ou a Fridays for Future. Já se fala de emergência climática, mas recusamo-nos a sair da zona de conforto, como se “emergência” não significasse isto exatamente: ‘acontecimento de gravidade excecional que requer (re)ação imediata ou urgente’”.

## 6.

### Concluding remarks

Some concluding notes may be added to this study.

#### 6.1.

The first note refers to the partially didactic character of the media discourse related to environmental issues (Ramos, 2011b). Readers are used to “learning”, acquiring knowledge about technical issues in the media. However, in the present case, not all articles collected give significant occasion to this potentiality. Articles that are simply reproductions of press releases from the LUSA news agency manifest a clearly limited didactic potential.

The remaining articles, the last one included, which show a higher investment by newspapers in their production, contain more relevant didactic potential, showing some of the complexity of the subject.

As a whole, the collected texts manifest the polyphonic character of media discourse. For Moirand (2000, 2003), this “polyphonic interdiscourse” is a constitutive feature of media explanation. In this sense, the didactic dimension would be assured. But such a dimension focuses essentially on the power struggle between political agents and not so much on public empowerment on the subject of the declaration of “climate emergency”. Climate issues are essentially materialized as a cause and space for conflict, particularly between generations and between political and social actors.

#### 6.2.

The vocabulary and textual modes of organization of science discourse transfer to media discourse. In some cases, there are reformulative segments, which indicate didactic intentions, but they are not frequent. It is possible that journalists consider that environmental discourse is already largely mastered by the majority of its readers, considering its spread and penetration into public discourse.

This may be the reason why article-producing scientists use, without particular restrictions, some technical jargon and even some forms of textual organization which are somewhat distant from the more typical models of the press. Their argumentative rationale also testifies to the scientific origin of their texts. Such options may serve the credibility of discourse, since science still receives a significant dose of trust.

#### 6.3.

The difficulty for the journalist in dealing with fracturing issues which are of scientific complexity and difficult to access is generally acknowledged. Some researchers, such as Moirand (1999, 2003) or Beacco *et al.* (2002) consider that one of the reasons for the journalist to evoke multiple voices is his permanent “discursive insecurity” when faced with problems that are controversial both in terms of scientific knowledge and of potential social repercussions.

Thus, it seems that the relative absence of the journalist’s voice can be explained: by limiting himself to the reproduction of other people’s voices, he preserves his face. In the case of all articles from JN, almost all from DN and one from *Público*, which are press release publications, the news agency journalist (almost) simply reproduces other people’s speeches. The texts are configured as objectified enunciation, with an external and



non-engaged focus. At a later time, its publication in the newspapers also seems to be the work of a simple copyist, who simply transfers the texts, with few modifications, to the space of the newspaper.

Editorial responsibility works at a more complex level: deciding which voices to listen to. However, nothing shows the public about the fundamentals of this option. Journalists give voice to political and social actors without disclosing which criteria they adopt. The modalisation they operate can be identified in discrete clues, such as the introductory verbs of someone else's speech, for example, but it is not evident.

The articles actually produced by the journalists of the newspapers analysed present greater complexity, but they are also largely built on the friction of voices evoked by the information mediator. He also maintains an objectified enunciation and chooses to offer the reader a confrontation of perspectives by evoking dissonant voices. However, the contextualisation of the problem of declaring a "climate emergency" is not deepened. His pragmatic goal seems to be to make-know, but not necessarily to make-understand.

Outside this description are the authors of opinion articles, including the 2023 article. Nevertheless, these, in the case of the collected texts, are not journalists. These authors fully assume their engaged speech and their ultimate pragmatic goal seems to be to ensure the reader's intellectual adherence and promote their action.

#### 6.4.

The environmental issue tends to be linked, in the collected corpus, to left-wing political parties (although some voices of the Portuguese parliamentary right-wing are also evoked) and to young people<sup>21</sup>. This builds the general idea that these are the sectors that most "naturally" attach themselves to this issue, pushing other social forces and other individuals to the periphery of the concerns for environmental balance.

#### 6.5.

No significant change in discourse can be identified between the two selected moments (2019 and 2023). In fact, what is visible is a similar rhetoric, with the same type of arguments and reasoning. The specialised discourse seems to have been transferred from the restricted spheres of the technical and scientific world to the discourse of the lay citizen, who is expected to master it.

#### 6.6.

To conclude, the stark difference in treatment of the issue of declaring "climate emergency" should be noted between the popular newspaper (JN – *Jornal de Notícias*) and, above all, the reference newspaper *Público*. While the first shows a scarce investment in the subject, having merely republished three press releases during the observation period, the second shows a much more significant investment. This can provide insight into the expectations each newspaper has about the interests of its audience and what each newspaper is willing to invest in clarifying and building knowledge.

The third newspaper, DN – *Diário de Notícias*, which also presents itself as a reference newspaper, has an intermediate position in this regard, unable to be on a par with its rival *Público*.

21 On the discourse that devalues political leaders and values young people and ordinary citizens, see Fonseca & Castro, 2022.

Overall, the three newspapers end up giving their readers a superficial idea of the problem in question. The didactic dimension is clearly lacking in the more superficial texts. Its traces are subdued by the media's apparent need to create conflict. In the more complex texts, it is subjugated to the activist dimension.

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