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Linguistic Analysis of the Newspaper
Discourse in Brazil: The Older People
and COVID-19

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Linguistic Analysis of the Newspaper Discourse in Brazil: The Older People and COVID-19

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Abstract

Brazil has been one of the countries most affected the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures taken by the Brazilian government to contain the spread of the virus have been the subject of national and international criticism. Among these measures is the topic of protection and isolation of older adults, which has been subject of discussion in Germany. Based on a discourse led by analytical and linguistic approach this paper analyses the media and public perception of the older generation concerning the coronavirus. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods of corpus analysis, we investigate the question of whether the older people are associated with the COVID-19 virus in a particular form and whether they are exposed to specific discrimination as a population group. The results of the data gathered from March to July 2020 show that older adults are often described as being vulnerable and belonging to the risk group in Brazilian media.

Keywords: COVID-19; older people; newspaper discourse

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1. Preliminary Remarks

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, older adults have been mostly described in the public discourse as belonging to a group more susceptible to the coronavirus. This fact led many governments in the world to adopt preventive measures to protect older people. However, the topic of the protection has been debated by ageing researchers in Germany who consider that reducing the older people to one homogeneous group of vulnerable individuals can provoke stereotyping and discrimination (Kruse, cited in Bierlein 2020; Wahl, cited in Dörhöfer, 2020).

The present paper extends this discussion about protection and discrimination, in reference to older people in Brazilian society, which has been one of the communities most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of this paper is to analyse the Brazilian public perception of the older generation concerning the coronavirus in the newspapers. The core of the investigation is the question of whether the older people in the newspapers' discourse are associated with the COVID-19 virus in a particular form and whether they are exposed to specific protection and discrimination processes as a population group.

The paper is divided into seven sections. It begins (Section 2) by briefly giving some demographic data

about the older adults in Brazil and describing how the first COVID-19 confirmed cases impacted this age group in the Brazilian society. Section 3 then moves on to explain the motivation behind our research question from the point of view of a discussion carried out in Germany. Section 4 provides an overview of the partly semi-automated methods applied to build our corpus, composed of journalistic press articles. Finally, Sections 5 and 6 show the results of both quantitative and qualitative analysis, that are congruent in emphasising the biological aspects of the older adults as being more vulnerable to the coronavirus. In the Summary Section, we also outline how future research might be attempted to explore the public image of the older people in other segments of Brazilian society, not described by the conventional public media.

2. Impact of the coronavirus on Brazilian's elderly population

According to the Brazilian legislation, an older adult is every individual aged 60 or over (Ministério da Saúde do Brasil, 2007). Brazil has about 29,374 million people in this age group, a number that represents 14.3% of the country's population (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2019, 3). The study *Estudo Longitudinal da Saúde dos Idosos Brasileiros (Elsi-Brasil)* (Longitudinal Study of the Health of Brazilian Elderly People) pointed out that almost 40% of the older adults suffer from one chronic disease, and almost 30% have two or more chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension or arthritis (Ministério da Saúde do Brasil, 2020). From this data, it can be concluded that at least

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40% of the elderly population is particularly susceptible to the coronavirus¹.

On February 26th, 2020, Brazil's first COVID-19 case was confirmed. It was an older adult living in São Paulo city who had returned from a trip to Italy. Brazil's first COVID-19 death was reported on March 17th, 2020. This death was also that of an older man living in São Paulo city who had diabetes and hypertension but had no record of having travelled abroad recently (Oliveira et al., 2020, 2). At the time when the disease was first detected in Brazil, both cases contributed to the consideration of the elderly as a risk group. According to Brazil's Ministry of health, the protection of this group was therefore a priority strategy. It was recommended that:

“people aged over 60 should stay at home whenever possible, restrict their movements to doing only strictly necessary activities, avoid using public transport and not frequent places where people are gathered.” (Oliveira et al., 2020, 2)

At the time, when the disease was first detected in Brazil, both cases contributed to the consideration of the elderly as a risk group. According to Brazil's Ministry of health, the protection of this group was therefore a priority strategy. It was recommended that: “people aged over 60 should stay at home whenever possible, restrict their movements to doing only strictly necessary activities, avoid using public transport and not frequent places where people are gathered.” (Oliveira et al., 2020, 2)

Even though Brazil's Ministry of Health's official statement emphasized the protection of older people as a priority strategy, it was not until the middle of March, that the federal government began to adopt stricter governmental policies to reduce the spread of the virus. Some examples of these policies were the partial restrictions of international travel, the declaration of a state of emergency and the allowance of individuals from vulnerable populations to start working from home (VanDusky-Allen, Shvestova, and Zhirnov 2020, under “The Rise of the Brazilian States”).

According to VanDusky-Allen, Shvestova, and Zhirnov (2020), the federal government and each federal state acted differently in Brazil. While President Jair Bolsonaro avoided adopting any policies at all, state governments established their own guidelines against the spread of the virus. Measures included the closure of schools, non-essential businesses, bars, restaurants and entertainment locations, and the mandatory use of face masks from April (VanDusky-Allen, Shvestova, and Zhirnov, 2020, under “The Rise of the Brazilian States”).

Against the protocols adopted by the governors, who

¹ According to Brazil's Ministry of Health, the elderly is a group, which is characterized as being at greater risk of complications and even death due to COVID-19.

used a concession granted by the superior federal court to establish their guidelines, the president suggested that only older people should stay at home, while other family members should keep going to work (Canineu and Brown, 2020).

In one interview about discrimination against older adults during the corona crisis, ageing researcher Hans-Werner Wahl declares (Dörhöfer, 2020) that assuming only older people should stay isolated, while the rest of the society return to the daily routine, is associated with a paternalistic attitude: younger people act, from a symbolic point of view, as the parents of the elderly, telling them what to do. In extreme situations this paternalistic behaviour could lead to a debate about short versus long life – a discussion, which according to Wahl, cannot be conducted and assessed based on life's length (Wahl, cited in Dörhöfer, 2020). According to Kruse (cited in Bierlein 2020), the social isolation of older people can result in the feeling that they are no longer part of society. Social isolation can be understood as “Mangel an Sozialkontakten, Zugehörigkeit und Teilhabe” (lack of social contact, belonging and participation) (Pantel 2021: 6). One of the consequences of social isolation is loneliness, which is a constant negative feeling of lack of meaningful interpersonal relationships (Pantel 2021: 6). Loneliness is not only found amongst older adults (Pantel 2021: 6) but, in combination with loss of social contact during the pandemic, it can aggravate the perception that older people are forgotten and can even lead to mental disorders (Kruse 2020). However, concrete results about the health consequences of social isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are still scarce (Pantel 2021: 7).

As we have seen in this section, the Brazilian government has treated the older people as belonging to a risk group since the beginning of the pandemic and has proposed that they should be isolated. At this point, it is appropriate to raise the question, whether newspaper texts have been describing the older people during the pandemic in Brazil in a similar way.

3. Research Questions

The starting point for our research was the epidemiological situation in Germany and other European countries such as Spain, Italy, France, etc., where, from the beginning of the pandemic, older adults were declared to be one of the high-risk groups. Special preventive measures were imposed on a small group amongst them, restrictions were also applied, especially concerning social contacts in retirement homes and hospitals.

These measures were discussed quite controversially in the German public media. Well-known researchers from Heidelberg University, such as Kruse and Wahl, who specialise in the subject of ageing, have issued public statements in which they question the benefits of the measures (Figure 1).

Figure1: Heidelberg scientists warns against discrimination



Both researchers criticise the generalisation of the whole group of older adults as belonging to a risk group and they point out that assuming this can be risky because “[...] so etwas ... schnell zu Stereotypenbildung, Diskriminierung und Stigmatisierung [führt]” (it can quickly lead to stereotyping, discrimination and stigmatisation) (Kruse, cited in Bierlein 2020). Kruse and Wahl do not ignore the fact that older and chronically ill people have to be specially protected during the COVID-19 pandemic, but they argue that “Altern ist ein hochgradig differenzierter Prozess [...]” (ageing is a highly differentiated process [...])’ (Kruse, cited in Bierlein 2020), that should be considered not only in terms of health loss and skill deficits. They advocate for the individual consideration of each individual – not only physical but also cognitive conditions (Kruse, cited in Bierlein 2020; Wahl, cited in Dörhöfer, 2020).

In practical terms, Kruse suggests creating a risk profile for each person together with his or her primary care physician, who can clarify what every subject can do to protect him/herself and others (Kruse, cited in Bierlein 2020).

As we have seen in the previous paragraph, the topic of protection, which is often perceived as discrimination, (as well as other forms of discrimination of the older adults) is a prominent topic of public debate in German newspapers. From this perspective, our interest was to investigate how the older adults and their protection were presented and discussed in Brazilian newspapers, a country severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In conclusion, the question of whether prejudices against older people can be identified on a linguistic level was investigated by our research.

4. Methods

This section intends to describe the semi-automated methods applied to acquire data from newspaper articles.

Firstly, newspaper articles from 13 Brazilian daily newspapers or releases from press agencies (Brasil em Fofhas, Correio, CMA, Envolverde, O Estado de S. Paulo, Folha de S. Paulo, Globo, Icrowd, Jornal Cana, Valor

Econômico Agence, Agência Estado and Blogolândia) were collected with the help of The LexisNexis database, an online database service, which provides, among other things, access to newspaper articles from all over the world. For this purpose, the keywords Brasil, coronavirus, Covid-19, idoso (older adult) and terceira idade (elderly) were used as search terms. The search was limited to articles published between January 1st and August 31st, 2020. The results of this query were approximately 2,000 texts.

Secondly, every article was checked manually to delete metadata as well as any duplication and reports that had not matched the search queries. Some of the texts in the corpus, which were identified with the keywords, had no reference to Brazil – for this reason they were eliminated manually as well.

Thirdly, to compare possible differences in the description of the older adults, depending on the stage of development of the corona cases in Brazil, the number of texts were organised into three subcategories, according to their period of publication. Based on the official statistics of the coronavirus in Brazil, provided by the website of the Ministry of Health of Brazil, the development of the pandemic was divided into three periods: Early stage of the pandemic breakout from January 1st to February 29th, the beginning of the rising epidemiological curve, with 1,402,041 accumulated cases until May 31st and the period of an increase in the number of COVID-19 confirmed cases, with 3,908,272 accumulated cases until August 31st ².

These three established periods were uploaded in the form of three sub-corpora in Sketch Engine, a corpus manager and text analysis software (Table 1):

Table 1. Sub-corpora organised according to the coronavirus development periods in Brazil

Period	Description
First period (From January 1 st to February 29 th)	Early stage of the pandemic breakout in Brazil
Second period (From March 1 st to May 31 st)	Beginning of rising epidemiological curve
Third period (from June 1st to August 31 st)	Period of an increasing number of cases which remained at high levels.

The concrete dimensions of the corpus data obtained for each period after the organisation stage can be observed in Table 2. For each period, Table 2 specifies the number of texts, tokens, and words:

² Monitora COVID-19. <https://bigdata-covid19a.icict.fiocruz.br/> (accessed February 2nd 2021)

Table 2: Corpus details

Corpus period	Texts	Tokens	Words
First period	33	23,623	19,806
Second period	1167	955,294	800,567
Third period	760	3,019,110	1,296,178
All	1960	3,998,027	2,116,551

The benefit of this approach was the possibility to work with a relatively large amount of data, controlled by date and theme.

5. Results

Are older people associated with the COVID-19 virus in a particular way? The results of the quantitative approach show that they are often perceived as a risk group, which supports the view that all subjects older than 60 are often generalized as one single group.

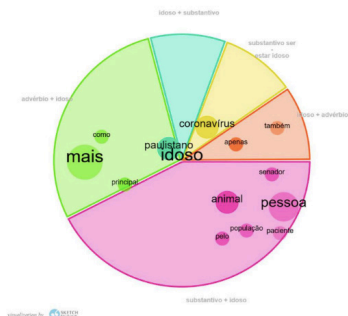
The quantitative analysis was first carried out with the lexeme *idoso* (older adult). Using the Word Sketch function from Sketch Engine, we were interested in collocational relationships, that is, words that occur juxtaposed with another with a greater frequency. The following section presents the results of the quantitative analyses for each sub-corpus.

5.1 Sub-corpus 1

As the reader will have noticed, the first sub-corpus consists of a small collection of texts, with 23,623 tokens. Since the texts were mainly published before the first COVID-19 infection case was confirmed in Brazil, the contents of the texts focused predominantly on possible predictions for Brazil.

The lemma *idoso* (older adult) has 74 occurrences in the first sub-corpus, and the search for word combinations with this lemma using the function *Word Sketch* yielded not surprising results (Figure 2). However, the evidence for the different collocates is extremely low and varies between 1 to 3 occurrences.

Figure 2: Collocations of *idoso* (Sub-corpus 1)



While the collocates with *população* (population) and *pessoa* (person) represent in this research context neutral terms, word combinations with the noun *paciente* (patient) especially emphasise the biological condition of an older person as being more susceptible to the coronavirus.

(1) *Dario Ramalho disse que considera plausível que, no inverno, haja uma sobrecarga no sistema de saúde por conta de novos casos que venham a ser registrados principalmente em pacientes mais idosos.* (Valor Econômico, February 27th, Coronavírus: MG prepara decreto para facilitar compra de equipamentos).

Dario Ramalho said that he considers it plausible that, in winter, there will be an overload in the health system due to new cases that will be registered mainly in older patients.

The term *Covid* is used only five times in sub-corpus 1, and only once in a context with *idoso*, but not in the form of a collocation:

(2) *O país já começa a contabilizar mortes por Covid em residenciais de idosos. O fato de haver muitas instituições que funcionam de forma irregular agrava ainda mais os riscos? É grande a preocupação com essas inúmeras casas de repouso que fogem de qualquer tipo de fiscalização.* (Folhapress, May 30th, Preconceito contra idosos cresce na pandemia, afirma ex-diretor de envelhecimento da OMS).

The country already begins to account for Covid deaths in retirement homes. Does the fact that many institutions operate irregularly further aggravate the risks? There is great concern about these numerous nursing homes that avoid any kind of inspection.

The relative paucity of evidence for *idoso* during this period limits the quantitative results in this part of the corpus, although the elderly part of the population is already perceived as being particularly affected by the pandemic.

5.2 Sub-corpus 2

The lemma *idoso/a(s)* (older adult) has 2.275 occurrences in the second sub-corpus. Similar collocates with the words *pessoa* (person) and *população* (population) can also be noticed in this period (see Figure 3), although the absolute, not the relative frequency of *idoso* (older adult) is much higher (2.275) in the period from March to May, as it can be seen from Table 3:

Table 3: Relative frequency of idoso in the three sub-corpora

Corpus	Relative frequency (%)
Sub-corpus 1	0,31%
Sub-corpus 2	0,238%
Sub-corpus 3	0,049%

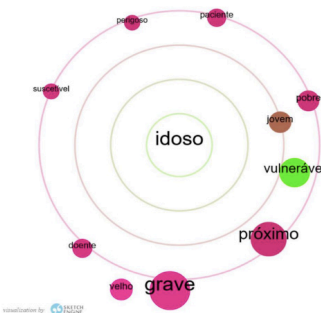
Figure 3: Collection of idoso (Sub-corpus 2)



The collocations now reveal the various affiliations of *idoso* with Covid-relevant contexts. Thus, *idoso* is used mainly in combinations with *idosos e/ou doentes crônicos* (older adults and chronically ill people – 27 occurrences), *idosos e portadore(s) de + doença*³ (older adults and “carriers of diseases” – 21 occurrences), with *paciente* (patient – paciente(s) idoso(s) – 12 occurrences) or *vítima* (victim - idosos são/eram vítimas – 3 occurrences).

To analyse the usage contexts in which the lemma *idoso* ‘older adult’ appears, we made use of *Sketch Engine’s* thesaurus function (see Figure 4). This function compares a specific lemma with lemmas used in similar contexts or with similar meaning.

Figure 4: Results of idoso for the Sub-corpus 2, using the Thesaurus function.



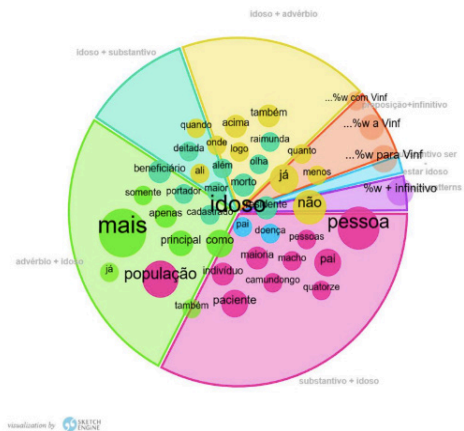
³ In this context, the collocation *idosos e portadores de doenças crônicas* is the most frequent with eight occurrences.

As can be seen in Figure 4, the similarity or proximity of the usage contexts of *idoso* (older adult) and *vulnerável* ‘vulnerable’ is particularly prominent. This indicates that *idoso* (older adult) was mainly used in terms of physical weakness or physical protection. The comparison of *idoso* with *velho* (old – 119 occurrences) using the Word Sketch Difference function also confirms the impression that the linguistic expression, *idoso*, is clearly preferred in public discourse and in relation to the disease.

5.3 Sub-corpus 3

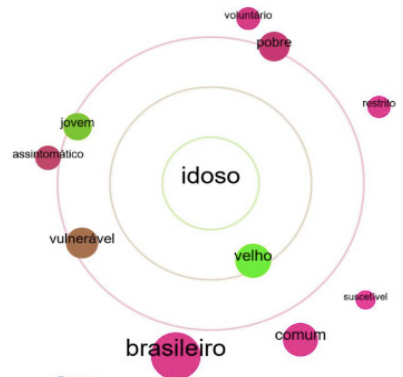
Again, as in the case of the first sub-corpus, a total of 1,478 occurrences with the lemma *idoso/a(s)* (older adults) reveal a series of neutral combinations that only describe the elderly population (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Collocates of idoso (Sub-corpus 3)



There are also collocates that show a noticeable emphasis on the biological aspects of the elderly through word combinations that express physical conditions, illness, or death (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Results of idoso for the Sub-Corpus 3, using the Thesaurus



visualização by SKETCH ENGINE

This is best exemplified through examples (3) and (4): respiratory or immunity problems).

(3) *“Ainda que o ora agravante seja considerado idoso e portador de comorbidades que o incluem no denominado grupo de risco em caso de contaminação pelo coronavírus, tal circunstância não lhe confere o direito subjetivo à prisão domiciliar”, alegou Fachin em seu voto.* (Folha de S. Paulo, August 2nd, 2020 “Gilmar pediu vista da ação que discute prisão domiciliar para o ex-ministro Geddel Vieira Lima”)

“Even though the aggravating ⁴ factor is considered an older adult and he has comorbidities that include him in the so-called risk group in case of contamination by the coronavirus, such circumstance does not give him the right to house arrest”, claimed Fachin in his vote.

(4) *Ele é um dos 1.164 mortos por Covid-19 nas últimas 24 horas no Brasil. Só um entre o total de 104.263 vítimas – até agora. Mas era o meu único pai. Idoso e paciente oncológico, ele estava em isolamento total desde o começo da pandemia.* (Folha de S. Paulo, August 14th, 2020, “Filha perde pai paciente oncológico para a Covid-19”)

He is one of the 1,164 killed by Covid-19 in the last 24 hours in Brazil. Only one out of a total of 104,263 victims – so far. But he was my only father. Older adult and cancer patient, he was in total isolation since the beginning of the pandemic.

5.4 Frequent Multi-Word Expressions in the sub-corpus 1-3

Since frequent collocates of *idoso* (older adult) often highlight the biological aspects of this age group, we tried to recognize a tendency in the usage of frequent word combinations that represent the older adults as a risk group. To achieve this, the function *N-grams of Sketch Engine*, was applied. This function generates frequency lists of multi-word expressions in the corpus; in our case we looked for expressions with three to four words.

In the first period, no patterns were identified due to the low number of tokens. In the other two periods, starting in March, older people were perceived as a risk group. In a high number of cases the elderly population was mentioned together with other risk groups, such as the following: *idosos e pessoas com necessidades especiais* (older adults and disabled people), *idosos e pessoas com doenças crônicas* (older adults and people with chronic diseases); *pessoas com problemas de saúde que comprometam o sistema imunológico* (people with health problems that compromise the immune system), *crianças até 2 anos* (children up to 2 years old), *gestantes* (pregnant women), *pessoas com problemas respiratórios ou de imunidade* (people with

We found in the three sub-corpora, 63 occurrences of the N-gram *idosos e pessoas com* (older adults and people with), in which older adults are placed, in a non-contrasting relation, together with other vulnerable individuals in the same category, as we can see in example (5):

(5) *O presidente tem repetido nos últimos meses que é preciso isolar somente idosos e pessoas com doenças crônicas, que estão nos grupos de risco da doença.* (Correio, August 17th, Palácio do Planalto tem 1ª morte pela covid-19; vítima era servidora da Presidência).

In recent months, the president has been repeating that it is necessary to isolate only older adults and people with chronic diseases, who are at-risk groups for the disease.

The N-gram results show that the older population is treated in the same way as other groups or risk groups.

Are older people exposed to specific discrimination processes as a population group in Brazilian newspapers? No cases of specific prejudice were identified by the quantitative analysis. Further conclusions of a quantitative nature could not be identified with our corpora for the selected research question. Therefore more qualitative approaches are necessary.

6. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis was carried out using the concordance search. The search for the lemma *idoso* (older adult) in its context of use in the three periods is congruent with the quantitative analysis. The results indicate that the newspapers articles often aim to write about the profile of the older adults being more vulnerable physically and emotionally, which is influenced by the fact that they remain alone for long periods of time. Examples (6, 7) and (8) are reports of different researchers' opinions. Whereas example (6, 7) emphasises the physical aspect, example (8) mentions the vulnerability of older people in the social field:

(6) *Ele [Mandetta] afirmou que as pessoas mais suscetíveis ao coronavírus são idosos, e que o Brasil não possui tantas pessoas neste grupo quanto países europeus.* (Agência CMA, February 26th, “Contraprova confirma caso da doença no Brasil”)

He [Mandetta] stated that the people most susceptible to the coronavirus are older adults and that Brazil does not have as many people in this group as European countries.

(7) *“Os jovens morrem menos, mas espalham o vírus para os idosos”, alertou a cientista.* (Agência Estado, August 25th, “Opas Espinal Brasil mostra tendência de baixa em casos de covid, mas ainda é preciso cuida-

⁴The term “aggravating factor” refers to the inmate in this context.

do”)

“Young people die less often, but spread the virus to the older people”, warned the scientist.

(8) *“No Brasil, a voz do idoso é silenciada”*. (Folha de S. Paulo, February 29th, Preconceito contra idosos cresce na pandemia, diz ex-diretor de envelhecimento da OMS)

“In Brazil, the voice of the elderly is silenced”.

In some corpus examples, it becomes clear that the attitude of a specific segment of the population towards the older people is quite ambivalent or even extremely negative, and not just in the time of the pandemic. The authors of such negative attributions within the Brazilian population are mostly not further specified.

(9) *Temos ouvido discursos que atribuem pouca relevância ao coronavírus por se tratar de uma doença com taxa de letalidade mais alta entre os idosos. O que isso diz de nós como sociedade? A situação fez com que se dramatizasse uma realidade já vivida pelos mais velhos, que é a de que eles são inúteis e um peso para a sociedade. Que só atrapalham, prejudicam, precisam ser controlados. É uma visão de que, quando você envelhece, pode ser eliminado. Mesmo antes da epidemia muitos sentiam que viviam uma espécie de morte simbólica. O valor que se dá a essas pessoas mais velhas é quase nulo, socialmente e dentro de casa.* (Folha de S. Paulo, March 26th 2020, “Pandemia só evidencia solidão de idosos e sensação de que são um peso diz Mirian Goldenberg”)

We have heard speeches that attribute little relevance to the coronavirus because it is a disease with a higher mortality rate among older people. What does that say about us as a society? The situation made it possible to dramatize a reality already experienced by older people, which is that they are useless and a burden on society. That only hinder, harm, need to be controlled. It is a view that when you get older, you can be eliminated. Even before the epidemic, many felt that they were experiencing a kind of symbolic death. The value given to these older people is almost nil, socially and at home.

The idea of a negative attitude, prejudice or discrimination towards the older adults can take different forms. In Brazil, the depreciation of the elderly population is called “*idadismo*”, which is reinforced in the context of COVID-19 (10):

(10) *Um grupo de intelectuais europeus publicou nesta semana carta aberta denunciando a ‘cultura do descarte’ do idoso durante a pandemia. Isso ocorre também no Brasil? Muito. Todo preconceito de idade, que eu chamo de ‘idadismo’, que já*

existia contra os idosos apenas aflora, aumenta com a questão da Covid. (Folha de São Paulo, February 29th, “Preconceito contra idosos cresce na pandemia, diz ex-diretor de envelhecimento da OMS”)-

This week a group of European intellectuals published an open letter denouncing the ‘disposal culture’ of older people during the pandemic. Does this also occur in Brazil? A lot. All age prejudice, which I call ‘ageism’, which already existed against the older adults only arises, increases with the issue of Covid.

Relatively early in the pandemic, in parts of Brazil – as in other places around the world – there was a request from different players for isolation of the elderly population and the chronically ill. Here in the concrete case of the infectologist and Secretary of State for Health in the State of São Paulo, David Uip

(11) *David Uip disse que o Estado de São Paulo fará a gerência de leitos, na medida das necessidades e poderá contar com a rede privada também. Ele recomendou que pacientes idosos e com doenças crônicas evitem aglomerações e salientou que hoje, pelo número de casos registrados no Estado (46), está descartado o fechamento de locais públicos ou o cancelamento de eventos, como exposições e shows.* (Estadão, March 12th 2020, “Não há, no momento, razão para pânico em SP por causa do coronavírus, diz Doria”).

David Uip said that the State of São Paulo would manage the hospital beds, as needed and would be able to count on the private network as well. He recommended that older adult patients with chronic diseases avoid crowding and he stressed that today, due to the number of cases registered in the State (46), the closing of public places or the cancellation of events, such as exhibitions and shows, was ruled out.

The risks of such isolation are highlighted at various points in the newspaper corpus, which includes increasing loneliness and depression (example 12), psychological consequences (example 13) and also the multiplication of domestic violence (example 14):

(12) *Quais são os efeitos psicológicos do distanciamento social e de uma quarentena? Isso impacta mais as pessoas idosas? Os idosos são uma preocupação porque eles sofrem com o isolamento social, muitos deles já estão sozinhos. E agora estão pedindo a eles que se isolem por meses. Isso aumenta a preocupação de que os idosos se sintam solitários ou deprimidos.* (Envolverde, March 27th 2020, “A história nos ensinou que as pessoas são resilientes diz autor do livro A psicologia da pandemia”).

What are the psychological effects of social distance and quarantine? Does this impact older people more? Older adults are a concern because they suffer from social isolation, many of them are already alone. And now they are being asked to isolate themselves for months. This increases the concern that older people feel lonely or depressed.

(13) *Confinamento também apresenta riscos – O isolamento, imposto para minimizar o perigo associado ao coronavírus, também implica uma série de riscos para os idosos. Vários médicos alertaram que o confinamento pode gerar, em pessoas muito vulneráveis, um alto grau de sofrimento psicológico que pode ser muito prejudicial.* (Agence, April 26th 2020, “Até que ponto os idosos são vulneráveis ao coronavírus”)

Confinement also presents risks – Isolation, imposed to minimise the danger associated with the coronavirus, also implies a series of risks for the older people. Several doctors have warned that confinement can cause, in very vulnerable people, a high degree of psychological suffering that can be very harmful.

(14) *Presidente do Centro Internacional da Longevidade Brasil, Kalache diz que tem aumentado também a violência doméstica contra idosos durante o isolamento social.* (Folha S. Paulo, February 29th 2020 “Preconceito contra idosos cresce na pandemia, diz ex-diretor de envelhecimento da OMS”)

President of the International Longevity Center Brazil, Kalache says that domestic violence towards older people has also increased during social isolation.

These psychological consequences, mentioned in the Brazilian Press, are in agreement with the opinion of Kruse and Wahl, who see the measures to maintain social contact as extremely important for the quality of life in old age (Kruse, cited in Bierlein 2020, Wahl, cited in Dörhöfer, 2020).

In the following example (15), a Brazilian sociologist reports on the widespread idea that the older population is useless and that the virus is suitable for social purification:

(15) *E agora, diante das escolhas médicas por “quem tem mais chance de sobreviver” à pandemia, ficou evidente um problema antigo em relação ao principal grupo de risco da covid-19. “Não duvido que tenha muita gente por aí achando que o coronavírus vai fazer uma limpeza social matando os idosos”, critica. As violências, continua, são muitas: “Sempre no sentido de marginalizar, eliminar. O idoso é alguém ‘que não serve mais para nada’, que ‘não contribui’. Mas,*

apesar da “morte simbólica” imposta, Alda destaca que nem todo mundo “opta por morrer” e “há quem opte por lutar”. E independentemente da covid-19, o idoso já lida constantemente com a proximidade da morte, lembra o psicanalista Marcelo Braz, 41. “Claro que a morte gera medo, mas a relação do idoso com a covid é praticamente constante”, explica. Por isso é tão importante construir uma rotina que afaste o sujeito desse pensamento, ainda que seja trabalhoso abrir mão desta rotina por causa da imposição do isolamento social. Difícil é quando, além de ser obrigado a mudar um hábito que muitas vezes é cultivado há décadas, o idoso se vê sem o poder de decidir sobre sua própria vida, afirma o psicanalista. “Já ouvi de um deles ‘não quero sair, porque não quero pegar covid e morrer’. (Correio, May 9th 2020, Taxados de teimosos, idosos pedem respeito aos cabelos brancos).

And now, in the face of medical choices of “who has the best chance of surviving” the pandemic, an old problem has become evident in relation to the main risk group of covid-19. “I do not doubt that there are a lot of people out there thinking that the coronavirus will do a social cleansing, killing the elderly”, he criticizes. The kinds of violence, he continues, are many: “Always in the sense of marginalizing, eliminating. The older person is someone ‘who is no longer of use’, who ‘does not contribute anymore’. But, despite the imposed “symbolic death”, Alda highlights that neither everyone “chooses to die” and “there are those who choose to fight.” And regardless of the covid-19, the older person constantly deals with the proximity of death, recalls the psychoanalyst Marcelo Braz, 41. “Of course, the COVID causes fear, but the relationship between the elderly and death is practically constant”, he explains. That is why it is so important to create a routine that takes the subject away from that thought, even though it is hard to give up this routine because of the imposition of social isolation. It is difficult when, in addition to being forced to change a habit that has often been cultivated for decades, the older people find themselves without the power to decide about their own lives, says the psychoanalyst. “I heard from one of them ‘I don’t want to go out, because I don’t want to get COVID and die’.

It is interesting to note that the justification for specific behaviour of the older adults could be the differing statements of various Brazilian government officials, who have been adopting diversified positions concerning the virus, as was noted in Section 2.

The press also reproduces excerpts from the President’s speech, in which the potential death of the elderly and disabled population isn’t excluded. By reproducing statements in the press agency’s message, the presidential statement achieves wider dissemination

(16) Bolsonaro rebateu as acusações e denuncia uma “luta pelo poder”. “Não faço demagogia. Não faço populismo. Podemos ter problemas sim por causa do coronavírus, pessoas com deficiência e idosos podem vir a óbito, mas responsabilizar o presidente por tudo isso pelo suposto péssimo exemplo é irresponsabilidade. É luta pelo poder”, afirmou o presidente na segunda-feira. (Agence, March 17th, “Após primeira morte, Bolsonaro”).

Bolsonaro refuted the accusations and denounced a “power struggle”. “I do not do demagoguery. I do not do populism. We may have problems because of the coronavirus, people with disabilities and older people may die, but blaming the president for all this for the supposedly bad example is irresponsibility. It is a struggle for power,” said the president on Monday.

In one case, special attention is drawn to the way older adults are treated in society: in this context, as individuals who are neglected:

(17) “*A gente cansa de ver experts dando depoimentos mas ninguém se coloca como idoso. O idoso é sempre o outro, não tem nada a ver comigo. No Brasil, não temos ONGs, conselhos de idosos atuando de forma efetiva e eficaz, a começar pelo federal*”. (Folha de S. Paulo, February 29th, “Preconceito contra idosos cresce na pandemia, diz ex-diretor de envelhecimento da OMS”)

“We get tired of seeing experts giving statements, but nobody puts themselves in the place of an older person. The older adult is always the other; they have nothing to do with me. In Brazil, we don’t have NGOs nor do we have councils for the elderly acting effectively and efficiently, not to mention the federal government [who doesn’t achieve this either].”

Moreover, in our three corpora there are also examples that do not report prejudice towards the older adults, but in fact, reveal different kinds of solidarity towards the older people, of social cohesion (examples 18 and 19), where the neutral term *idosos* is not used, but *velhos* (old) is resorted to.

(18) O País está conseguindo parar ou ao menos reduzir drasticamente a interação social. Ha um espírito cívico no ar. Vejo jovens que não se expõem, não para se proteger, mas para não colocar os mais velhos ou o mundo ao redor em risco. (Estadão, March 20th, “horror real”)

The country is managing to stop or at least drastically reduce social interaction. There is a civic spirit in the air. I see young people who do not expose themselves, not to protect themselves, but not to put the older ones or the world around them at risk.

(19) Têm coisas muito bonitas acontecendo, vizinhança se mobilizando, os mais jovens se oferecendo para comprar coisas aos mais velhos. (Folha de São Paulo, March, 30, 2020 “Quem elogia tortura, admira torturador, não se coloca no lugar do outro, diz Miriam Chnaiderman”)

There are very beautiful things happening, the neighbourhood is mobilizing, the younger ones are offering to buy things for the older ones.

In one example (20), the elderly, along with children, are even credited with the ability - despite their vulnerability in a crisis - to ultimately be more resilient when starting over.

(20) Em todas essas situações, os idosos, junto com as crianças, eram as pessoas mais vulneráveis, mas eram também os mais resilientes na reconstrução. É o idoso que tem aquela capacidade de ver a luz no final do túnel. (Folha de S. Paulo, February 29th, 2020, “Preconceito contra idosos cresce na pandemia, diz ex-diretor de envelhecimento da OMS”)

In all these situations, older people and children together were the most vulnerable people, but they were also the most resilient in rebuilding themselves. It is the older adult who has that ability to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

The results acquired by the qualitative analysis seem to partly confirm those of the quantitative analysis. In other words, they also provide evidence that older adults are described as a risk group in the Brazilian newspaper media. As we have shown in the present section, there were various examples in which discrimination against older people was mentioned. However, these are exclusive statements, from individual scientists, politicians or the attitude of private persons interviewed, which are reproduced in the newspaper texts as part of the reporting. They echo discussions that are taking place within Brazilian society in different contexts.

7. Summary

In this paper, we analysed the media perception of the older generation concerning the coronavirus in Brazil, based on a discourse led by an analytical, linguistic approach. To achieve that, we collected newspaper articles of Brazilian daily newspapers with the help of The LexisNexis database. We applied both quantitative and qualitative methods to the corpus analysis.

To return to our original research question, whether older people are associated with the coronavirus in a particular form, the results suggested that they are often characterised as being vulnerable and needy. Using the thesaurus function, it was possible to notice that in all three defined sub-corpora there was a proximity between the contexts of use of *idoso/a(s)*

and words that emphasise the biological conditions of the older adults as being more exposed to the risks of the coronavirus. The quantitative analysis also showed frequent word combinations such as “grupo de risco” and “pessoas” “com” in the second and third period sub-corpora, which reinforced the image of the elderly as belonging to a risk group. This image is consistent with Wahl’s (cited in Dörhöfer, 2020) and Kruse’s (cited in Bierlein 2020) criticism about reducing the whole group of people aged 60 or over to a homogeneous category of vulnerable and related to death people, without taking individual aspects into consideration.

Since further conclusions of a quantitative nature could not be identified within our corpora, we used the concordance function to make a qualitative analysis of the usage contexts of the term *idoso*. The results of the qualitative analysis confirmed the image of the older people in the Brazilian press as being physically, emotionally, and socially vulnerable.

The second main research question considered possible discrimination processes against elderly people in the Brazilian press. The results of both quantitative and qualitative analysis could – in a limited way – reveal examples and descriptions of social discrimination.

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