



Clause Complex: expansion relations in an opinion article about the 2016 Brazilian presidential impeachment

Complexo Oracional: relações de expansão em um artigo de opinião sobre o impeachment presidencial brasileiro de 2016

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ABSTRACT: Several opinion pieces published in the media have positioned themselves for or against the impeachment process of former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff in 2016. The debate of these controversial discourses about the impeachment was realized in language through lexicogrammatical resources to connect reasoning and claim towards a conclusion. One of these linguistic resources is conjunctions, which are used both to connect events and organize a text (Rose, 2020). This paper discusses clause complexing in Brazilian Portuguese and its role in developing argumentative reasoning in a text. For that, it analyzes an opinion piece entitled *Por que sou a favor do impeachment* [Why I am for the impeachment], written by Brazilian sociologist Carlos Eduardo Sell (2016), published in a Southern Brazilian news website - *Clic RBS* - five days after the special committee approved the initiation of proceedings against Dilma. The theoretical background of the present study is Halliday and Matthiessen's Systemic Functional Linguistics (2014), specifically the ideational metafunction and its logical component (clauses as logical relations) in Systemic Functional Grammar. First, the clauses were manually identified and segmented based on printed copies of the texts, which were subsequently annotated (n=87). Next, clause complexes were identified and categorized according to their function (expanding, projecting, or embedding). Finally, we described and explained patterns of language use in excerpts from the text. The analysis indicates that the opinion piece is grammatically intricate due to the frequency of both embedded clauses (n=30) and logico-semantic relations of expansion by enhancement (n=16). The non-congruency of the text under analysis is in the high number of embedded clauses because these are rankshifted clauses related to nominal or adverbial groups. These lexical choices are related to the oral register of language, which leads us to hypothesize that it is a strategy the author used to further and obtain broader reaching and acceptance of his political stance on the 2016 Brazilian presidential impeachment.

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RESUMO: Vários artigos de opinião publicados na mídia posicionaram-se a favor ou contra o processo de impeachment da ex-presidenta brasileira Dilma Rousseff em 2016. O debate desses discursos controversos sobre o impeachment foi realizado na linguagem por meio de recursos léxico-gramaticais para conectar argumentos às teses em direção a uma conclusão. Um desses recursos linguísticos são as conjunções, que são utilizadas tanto para conectar eventos quanto organizar um texto (Rose, 2020). Este artigo discute complexos oracionais no português brasileiro e o seu papel no desenvolvimento de argumentação em um texto. Para isso, analisa um artigo de opinião intitulado “Por que sou a favor do impeachment” escrito pelo sociólogo brasileiro Carlos Eduardo Sell (2016) e publicado em uma página eletrônica de notícias do sul do Brasil - *Clic RBS* – cinco dias após a comissão especial aprovar a abertura do processo contra Dilma. A base teórica deste estudo é a Linguística Sistêmico-Funcional de Halliday e Matthiessen (2014), especificamente a metafunção ideacional e seu componente lógico (orações como relações lógicas) da Gramática Sistêmico-Funcional. Primeiramente, as orações foram manualmente, a partir da impressão dos textos e subsequente anotação (n=87). A seguir, os complexos oracionais foram identificados e categorizados de acordo com a sua função (expansão, projeção ou encaixamento). Por fim, descrevemos e explicamos padrões de uso da linguagem em excertos do texto. A análise indica que o artigo de opinião é gramaticalmente intrincado devido à frequência tanto de orações encaixadas (n=30) quanto de relações lógico-semânticas de expansão por intensificação (n=16). A não congruência do texto sob análise está no elevado número de orações encaixadas pois são orações que mudam de nível, relacionadas a grupos nominais ou adverbiais. Essas escolhas lexicais estão relacionadas ao registro oral da linguagem, o que nos leva a hipotetizar que esta é uma estratégia do autor usada para aumentar e obter alcance e aceitação mais amplas do seu posicionamento político com relação ao impeachment presidencial brasileiro de 2016.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Impeachment. Artigo de opinião. Linguística Sistêmico-Funcional. Complexos oracionais. Intricacia gramatical.

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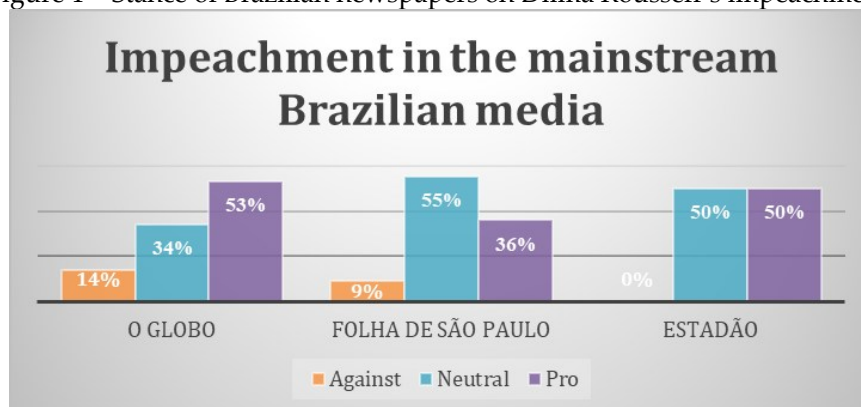
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1 Introduction

Various media institutions have published about the impeachment process of former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff through editorials and opinion pieces. Arguments for and against the impeachment appeared overwhelmingly in widely distributed Brazilian newspapers, such as *O Globo*, *Folha de São Paulo*, and *Estadão*, in many registers (Halliday; Hasan, 1989).

In the impeachment process of Rousseff, the concept of legitimation is a key component in the role played by the journalistic media discourse. Legitimation is the normative basis on which political stability is founded (Hechter, 2009). Carvalho and Lima (2020), in the field of Social Psychology, have shown that the main national newspapers positioned themselves to delegitimize the elected government (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Stance of Brazilian newspapers on Dilma Rousseff's impeachment.



Source: adapted from Carvalho and Lima (2020, p. 13), based on Manchetômetro (2016).

The legitimation of the impeachment and the right to remain in power were hotly debated in society. Linguistically, discourse strategies such as “presenting accusations as facts, ... positive self-presentation, and attacking the accusation that the impeachment was in fact a political coup” (Van Dijk, 2017, p. 225) were present in news headlines and editorials.

The debate of these controversial discourses was realized in language through grammatical resources. One of these resources is conjunctions, which are used both to connect events and organize a text (Rose, 2020). Research on the use of conjunctions from a systemic functional linguistic perspective has been developed in mental health and neurolinguistics (Nagar; Fine, 2013; Armstrong, 1992), additional language learning (Teruya, 2006), academic writing (Vian Jr.; Mendes, 2015), and school textbooks (Weber; Fuzer, 2020; Cargnin, 2019). This paper shares with these previous studies the interest in exploring the system of expansion in the clause complex. However, our focus differs from theirs regarding the analyzed text – opinion pieces –

and the investigation of the role that embedded clauses play in constructing the argument.

Focusing on the relevance of the impeachment process in the Brazilian political scenario, we analyzed an opinion piece published on April 16th, 2016. The text was collected from a Southern Brazilian news website – *Diário Catarinense/ Clic RBS*¹ - five days after the special committee approved the initiation of proceedings against Dilma.

In the opinion piece “Why I’m for the impeachment” (*Por que sou a favor do impeachment*), we investigated how the author logically constructs argumentation at the semantic level. To accomplish this, we carried out a logico-semantic analysis of the clause complexes forming the corpus. As a result, we explain the author’s lexicogrammatical choices regarding expansion (elaborating, extending, and enhancing relations) and embedding, according to Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

After this introduction, we explain the concept of clause complexes within the SFL paradigm (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014), providing examples of linguistic resources used to connect clauses in a text (Section 2). Next, we describe the methodological stages (Section 3), followed by the linguistic analysis, identifying, and categorizing the clause complexes, according to tactic and logico-semantic analytical categories (Section 4). Finally, in the conclusion section, we explain the relations between the clause complexes in terms of choice, function, and frequency (Section 5).

2 Clause complexing in the SFL paradigm

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a sociosemiotic theory of language, which means that it investigates meaning construction in the relation between language and social structure. According to this approach, meaning is constructed and realized

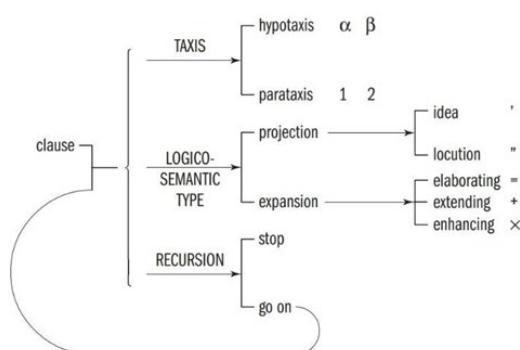
¹ The original webpage (<http://dc.clicrbs.com.br/sc/vozes/noticia/2016/04/por-que-sou-a-favor-do-impeachment-5779487.html>) is no longer available. The text was retrieved from a reproduction published on April 17, 2016. Available at: <https://diplomattizando.blogspot.com/2016/04/por-que-sou-favor-do-impeachment-carlos.html>. Accessed on: Sep. 01, 2026.

through different strata, in which smaller units of language form larger ones. For instance, in the lexicogrammatical stratum, morphemes form words, which, in turn, form groups, and these form clauses. The systemic functional description of clause complex relations is above the clause. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 428) state that through this orientation, it is possible to perceive “how the flow of events is construed in the development of text at the level of semantics”.

In addition to the criterion of language stratification, another parameter of language organization is metafunction. According to Butt and Webster (2017, p. 99), the Greek word *meta* “suggests something that is over and above the more concrete instances of function”. Thus, besides investigating the potential meaning patterns of a language in particular registers through a trinocular perspective - from above (focusing on clause complexes), below (focusing on lexicogrammatical features), and around (semantic level) - SFL also analyzes clauses in a tridimensional frame.

One dimension, the ideational metafunction, construes human experience. The other, interpersonal metafunction, enables social relations, while a third, called textual metafunction, “build[s] up sequences of discourse, organizing the discursive flow, and creating cohesion and continuity” (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 31). Our analysis centers on the ideational metafunction, classified into two categories: 1) experiential: the focus is on a single clause (also called simplex); 2) logic: the focus is on the system of clause complexing. In the logic mode, the binding of logical sequences in clause complexes occurs as tactic and logico-semantic relations (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – The system of clause complexing.



Source: Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 438).

The tactic system functions to determine the degree of interdependency between clauses in a clause complex. Those with equal status are paratactically related, while the ones with unequal status are hypotactically dependent. Example #1², retrieved from the corpus, illustrates a paratactic clause complex. The first column presents the example number; the first line is the English version of the original Brazilian Portuguese text (line 2). The third line shows the clause status, in which the numerals indicate independent clauses.

E#1	(...) motivating their decision	and guiding their subjective judgment.
E#1	(...) motivando sua decisão	e instruindo seu julgamento íntimo.
	1	2

The two clauses forming this clause complex are potentially independent of one another because each of them presents a proposition and an agnate form when separated. In this type of relation, the primary clause, called the initiating clause, is signaled with number 1, whereas the second one, called the continuing clause, is signaled with number 2 (and so on). Example #1 shows a clause complex composed of two non-finite clauses. The linker “and” expands the meaning of the initiating clause “motivating...”. This conjunction signals an additive relation, in this case, the inclusion of a second outcome “guiding...” related to the Subject “other crimes” (line 32 of the text³) in the main clause. One possible reading of this passage, considering the lexicogrammatical realization, is that such other crimes should influence (“motivate” and “guide”) the Parliament members’ decision to vote for or against the impeachment. In the same passage, the author mentions obstruction of justice as one example of “other crimes”.

² We provided an English version of the examples originally written in Portuguese.

³ The full text is presented in the Appendix.

Example #2, also retrieved from the corpus, is an instance of a hypotactic clause complex. Regarding notation, the Greek alphabet is used, being the dominant clause identified by alfa (α) and the dependent one by beta (β).

E#2	Eventually, such practice was used	to deceive Brazilian people
E#2	Por fim, tal prática foi utilizada	para enganar o povo brasileiro
	α	β

In this excerpt, “to deceive Brazilian people” (para enganar o povo brasileiro) has a dependent status in relation to “such practice was used” (tal prática foi utilizada). The latter does not have its proposition (i.e., an exchange of information in the form of a statement or a question); therefore, it is not possible to create an agnate clause separately from the first. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), in Systemic Functional terms, the main clause is called dominant, and the secondary one is known as dependent.

Hypotactical and paratactical relations may be interrelated, forming nestings (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014). In this process, clause subcomplexes emerge from primary clause complexes. Example #3 demonstrates such a process, in which logico-semantic relations are linking both paratactic clauses and subcomplexes in the clause nexus.

E#3	If we remember	that Collor was removed from office due to a Fiat Elba	this crime is far from being the smallest one	... because any law violation is never a mere fact
E#3	Se lembrarmos	que Collor foi deposto por causa de um Fiat Elba	esse crime está longe de ser menor	... porque qualquer violação da lei nunca é fato banal
	β		A	
	α	β	1	2

Besides the degree of interdependency between clauses, another system comes into play in the construction of clause complexes, concerning their logical and semantic nature. In the next section, we present the system of logico-semantic relations and its types.

2.1 Logico-semantic relations of expansion: specifying, adding, or qualifying meaning

Despite the diversity of logico-semantic relations connecting clauses, they are grouped into two main types: projection and expansion (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014). These are simultaneously realized through the tactic system. Projections function as a linguistic representation of another representation. They are realized by mental and verbal processes by pointing out the thought of the speaker/writer or when this recurs to another person's clauses. Some functions of projected clauses include attributing "sources in news reporting", representing "views in scientific discourse", constructing "dialogue in narratives", and framing "questions in conversation" (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 509).

According to Figure 2, the projection system enables two semantic choices: locution and idea. Locution, in comparison to traditional grammar, deals with reported or cited discourse, projected through verbal clauses. The system of idea covers cited or reported thought. It is through mental processes that cited or reported thought is projected. Processes such as "say", "argue", or "explain" realize verbal processes. Mental clauses in turn are realized by verbs such as "infer", "think", or "wish".

In this paper, our focus is on the system of expansion and its three subcategories, namely elaborating, extending, and enhancing. Elaborating clauses reaffirm, comment, exemplify, or specify a primary clause. The equality sign (=) is used to represent such a semantic resource. Extending clauses in turn add, substitute, or offer an alternative. The typical paratactic extension markers are "and", "or", and "but", while in hypotactical extension some of them are "while", "apart from",

“besides”, and “if...not”. Finally, enhancing clauses develop another clause, through reference to time, place, manner, cause, or condition.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) add another type of expansion that does not run through the tactical relations system because it does not occur between clauses. Embedding means that a clause or phrase functions as a constituent within the structure of a nominal or verbal group. In embeddings, the relation established is not realized between clauses and, therefore, it does not configure hypotaxis or parataxis. The embedding system is a result of the semogenic capacity of language, that is, of creating new meanings and, consequently, new lexicogrammatical possibilities.

The embedding resource is a change of rank in the clause status. For it does not establish a tactic relation between clauses by hypotaxis or parataxis, the embedded clause is considered a constituent of a group. It functions as the nucleus of a nominal group or a Postmodifier in adverbial or nominal groups. Double square brackets ([[]]) are used to mark embedded clauses.

When the embedded clause is a Postmodifier, its function “is essentially to define, delimit or specify” (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 493) a nominal or an adverbial group. In comparison to traditional grammar, embeddedness is equivalent to restrictive adjective clauses. Example #4 illustrates the use of embedding serving as a Postmodifier of a nominal group.

E#4	it is a requirement [[that arises from the violation of the Fiscal Responsibility Law, and in accordance with Article 5 of the Law 1.079/1950]].
E#4	é exigência [[que decorre em virtude da violação da Lei de Responsabilidade Fiscal, e conforme previsão do artigo 5 da Lei 1.079 de 1950]].

In this excerpt, the information conveyed in the embedded clause is not new; its function is to define and restrict the meaning in the main clause. By specifying the noun phrase “requirement” (exigência) in terms of legal basis, the demand for impeachment is justified by the accusation of breaking the national budget law.

Expansion by enhancement is illustrated in Example #5, in which the embedded clause “concerning a very specific conduct” (no que diz respeito a uma conduta bastante específica) provides a Circumstance of Matter.

E#5	In this sense, the indictment in progress concerns only the aspect of the exercise of government and [[concerning a very specific conduct]].
E#5	Neste sentido, a acusação em curso incide apenas no aspecto do exercício do governo e [[no que diz respeito a uma conduta bastante específica]] ⁴ .

In this passage, the circumstance is delimiting the scope of the accusation. The writer uses prepositional phrases as a resource to specify the Head of the nominal group “indictment” (acusação). The deployment of such forms contributes to advancing the argument that there is a clear-cut cause for the impeachment of Rousseff.

When the embedded clause is a Head in a nominal group, it functions generally as a participant of a material or a relational process (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 500-503). The following example (E#6) shows the realization of this type of embedding in a relational clause.

E#6	coup is [[irrigating their campaign with illicit money]].
E#6	golpe é [[irrigar sua campanha com dinheiro ilícito]].

Thus, “irrigating their campaign with illicit money” (irrigar sua campanha com dinheiro ilícito) is the Identifier of “coup” (golpe), specifying it in one of its fundamental characteristics.

The next section presents the methodology followed to develop the analysis.

⁴ In this case, the Portuguese original text requires an embedded clause initiating with a preposition.

3 Methodology

3.1 Corpus

The corpus of the present research is constituted by an opinion piece published on April 16th, 2016, by the Southern Brazilian newspaper *Diário Catarinense* and on a news website named *Clic RBS*. This website is part of the *Globo* media company. An opinion piece is a genre in which people share their point of view on a topic of interest (Cortázar *et al.*, 2021) to provoke a reaction (of alignment or contrariety) in the reader (Mowat; Jopling, 2020). The text entitled *Por que sou a favor do impeachment* approaches the polemic generated by the impeachment process of former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff. It was written by sociologist and *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina* professor Carlos Eduardo Sell.

In the following subsection, we detail the procedures used to analyze and interpret data.

3.2. Analytical procedures

To achieve the goal of investigating how the flux of events at the semantic level is logically constructed in an opinion piece, we first identified the nexus forming clause complexes. The second research step was categorizing these nexuses according to the three kinds of logico-semantic relations: expansion, projection, or embeddedness. We manually identified and segmented 87 clauses, based on printed copies of the text, which were subsequently annotated. Table 1 shows the distribution of the clauses in the text as simple, complex and embedded.

We used Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014) parameters to classify each instance. The purpose of this procedure was to obtain an overview of what types of logico-semantic relations were used by the author to construct reasoning. Finally, we described and explained patterns of language use in illustrative excerpts from the text.

Table 1 – Logico-semantic relations in the corpus.

Clauses				Total
Simple		21		21
Complex	Notation	Parataxis	Hypotaxis	
Elaboration	=	1	2	3
Extension	+	10		10
Enhancement	x	7	9	16
Verbal projection	“		2	2
Idea projection	‘		5	5
Subtotal		18	18	36
Embedding				
Elaboration	=e	27		27
Extension	+e			
Enhancement	xe	2		2
Verbal projection	“e			
Idea projection	‘e	1		1
Subtotal		30		30
TOTAL				87

Source: the authors based on corpus data.

4 Results and Discussion

One of the findings gleaned from this study of clause complexes was that the flux of events and arguments is logically constructed through expansion (enhancing and extension) or embedding in our sample text. This means that reasoning is built through the increase of the meaning potential in causal-conditional clauses or through definitions, specifications, and delimitations.

A relevant occurrence is expansion by enhancement. In this category, the clauses – both continuing and dependent – increase the meaning of primary or dominant clauses, by referencing time, place, manner, cause, or condition. Example #7 illustrates the use of expansion by paratactic causal-conditional enhancement.

E#7	The 2nd. violation occurs in its context of practice, i.e., its <i>modus operandi</i> ,	because even a [[legitimately elected]] government has no right [[to commit crimes]]
E#7	A 2ª violação ocorre no âmbito do seu exercício, ou seja, de seu <i>modus operandi</i> ,	pois mesmo um governo [[eleito de forma legítima (com maioria dos votos)]] não recebe o direito [[de delinquir]] †
	1	x2 [[]] [[]]

The logico-semantic operation deployed in this passage is one of reason-giving. The textual element “because” (*pois*) introduces the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the mandate of Mrs. Rousseff. However, there is an indication of counter-expectancy related to this statement. The lexeme “even” (*mesmo*) indicates that attitudinal values are at play - legitimacy entails a limited set of licit actions. By using the embedded clause “to commit crimes” (*de delinquir*) to specify the nominal group “right” (*direito*), the writer suggests illicitness in the administration, which might not be entailed as belonging to the semantic field of legitimacy rights.

E#8 is an instance of the hypotactic temporal and causal-conditional types.

E#8	It only revokes the sacred popular mandate	when and because the president set herself against the law
E#8	Ele só revoga o sagrado mandato popular	quando e porque o governante se colocou ao arrepio da lei
	α	$X\beta$

The pronoun “it” (*ele*) refers to the noun “impeachment” in the same paragraph. Readers are presented with two logico-semantic relations: time and reason as resources to construct meaning. In connection with the President’s conduct, these semiotic resources specify the circumstances for resorting to the impeachment device.

Another relevant occurrence was expansion by extension, mainly in the addition semantic field, as shown in Example #9.

E#9	However, the constitutional process of impeachment <<and for this reason legitimate >> is not only legal	but (it is) also political.
E#9	No entanto, o processo constitucional <<e, por isso, legítimo, de afastamento >> não é somente jurídico,	mas também (é) político.
	1<< >>	+2

In this passage, the Classifier “political” (político) adds another face to the process of impeachment, which was first classified as “legal” (jurídico). Thus, law and politics seem to be connected, although belonging to different domains, to justify the impeachment’s legitimacy and amplitude.

Another high occurrence in the corpus was embedded clauses. They can modify nominal groups by restricting their range of meaning. Excerpt E#10 is an instance of a relation of elaboration, in which the meaning of the noun “elections” (eleições) is specified.

E#10	because the elections	[[that took her to power]] ,
E#10	pois as eleições	[[que a levaram ao poder]] ,

Among all the elections held in Brazil, there are only two options the author may refer to in the passage - the 2010 or the 2014 presidential race, the ones that Ms. Rousseff ran and was elected.

No examples of embedded extending clauses were found in the corpus. This type of logical meaning is configured in the lexicogrammatical stratum using non-restrictive clauses linked by the possessive pronoun “whose” or the relative pronoun “which” to add or alternate new information.

The following passage, E#11, presents an instantiation of embedded enhancement. The author chose a circumstance of Matter to constitute the downranked clause.

E#11	In this sense, the indictment in progress concerns only the aspect of the exercise of government and	[[with respect to a very specific conduct]].
E#11	Neste sentido, a acusação em curso incide apenas no aspecto do exercício do governo e	[[no que diz respeito a uma conduta bastante específica]].
		=extension

There are embedded projections in the text, as in E#12, in which the embedded clause functions as the Head of a noun phrase.

E#12	It is born from the conviction	[[that a representative government exists under the aegis of law]]
E#12	Ele nasce da convicção	[[de que um governo representativo existe sob a égide da lei]].

In E#12, the embedded clause “that a representative government exists under the aegis of law” (de que um governo representativo existe sob a égide da lei) functions as a Postmodifier of the nominal group the conviction (a convicção), a nominalization of the mental process “to convince” (convencer). It specifies which type of conviction the author is referring to – the existence of a government under the aegis of law” (a existência de um governo sob a égide da lei).

Many embedded clauses in this text function to enhance the author’s point of view and thus support his claim. For instance, in the following passage, the word coup (golpe) is recurrent in a series of propositions.

E#13	coup is	[[irrigating their campaign with illicit money]].
	golpe é	[[irrigar sua campanha com dinheiro ilícito]].
		=extension
E#13	coup is	[[besmirching the reputation of the Parliament with vote buying]].
E#13	golpe é	[[macular o Congresso com compra de votos]].
		=extension
E#13	coup is	[[charging bribes for approving corrupt bids]]
E#13	golpe é	[[cobrar propina em licitações corrompidas]].
		=extension
E#13	coup is	[[dilapidating Petrobras for these purposes]]
E#13	golpe é	[[dilapidar a Petrobrás com esse fim]].
		=extension
E#13	coup is	[[trying to protect a man sued by the Justice Department by rewarding him the position of minister]]
E#13	golpe é	[[tentar proteger um acusado pela justiça com status de ministro]].
		=extension
E#13	coup is	[[forming a parallel government in a luxury hotel room]]
E#13	golpe é	[[constituir um governo paralelo em um quarto de hotel de luxo]].
		=extension

In Example #13, the author resorts to repetition to list different definitions for the lexeme “coup”. These definitions are realized by clauses that refer to actions the

author attributes to the Workers' Party administration at that time. The effect of parallelism contributes to persuading the reader of the involvement of the president in these series of actions.

The example below (E#14) shows two clauses linked together through paratactic extension. The initiating clause expresses the modal meaning of veracity, assessing the proposition in the continuing clause. This type of grammatical construction is called interpersonal grammatical metaphor and, in this genre, expresses authorial positioning regarding the degree of validity of the proposals that follow.

E#14	It is true [[that the impeachment is not a recall, and the lack of governability does not justify it]].		
E#14	É verdade [[que o impeachment não é <i>recall</i> e a falta de governabilidade não o justifica]].		
E#14	É verdade	[[que o impeachment não é <i>recall</i>	e a falta de governabilidade não o justifica]].
		[[1	+2]]
	[[1 ^ +2]]		

The embedded clause is formed by two declarative clauses in which there is no human participant to establish the link between them. The lexeme “recall” borrowed from English to Portuguese is usually part of the semantic field of vehicles. However, it is used in the first embedded clause to refer to the impeachment. According to the Cambridge Dictionary⁵, to recall is “to order the return of a product made by a company because of a fault in the product”. Therefore, the author implies that the President or the administration could not be “returned” due to its “flaws” or “failure” to meet the standards. The second embedded clause restates the meaning construed in the first clause because “lack of governability” (falta de governabilidade) might be considered a “failure” in obtaining congressional support.

⁵ Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/recall>. Accessed on: Sept 14, 2026.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we propose to analyze the role of clause complexes in the development of argumentative reasoning in an opinion article in favor of the impeachment of a former Brazilian president. The analysis was based on the theory and method of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014), focusing on the ideational metafunction and its logical component.

We found that, by choosing the nexus forming the clause complexes, the author's lexical choices evidence embeddings of the elaboration type (31% of the corpus), and expansion by enhancing (18,4% of the corpus) mostly. These results follow other studies on logico-semantic relations in political opinion pieces, such as Nunes (2018), who found a predominance of expansion by enhancement in a corpus of opinion articles, editorials, and open letters.

The writer also resorted to what Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and Gouveia (2012) call grammatical intricacy, i.e., the ratio between clauses and the clause complexes they are part of, to reach a broader audience. These authors affirm that the more grammatically intricate a text is, the closer it is to the oral language register.

Ninin, Joseph, and Maciel (2015) clarify that grammatical intricacy is characteristic of the non-congruent mode of language: it is a type of realization in which the primary function of the elements is distorted. The non-congruency of the text under analysis is in the high number of embedded clauses because these are rankshifted clauses related to nominal groups. By approaching the oral register of language, the author probably seeks to obtain a broader reach and acceptance of his views about the impeachment, making the reading accessible to his audience. It is important to emphasize that reading is made easier also by the relatively high number of simple clauses, which implicitly function to intensify other clauses.

Another factor that could correspond to the high occurrence of embedded clauses is their function in delimiting clauses. The author resorts to embedded clauses

so his reader does not doubt his opinion and/or about who or what (nominal groups) is his opinion about.

Finally, concerning the frequent use of expansion by enhancing, it is possible to relate it to the title of the text, *Por que sou a favor do impeachment?*, Sell (2016) intensifies the primary or dominant clauses mostly in the semantic field of reasoning (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014), illustrating the reasons why he was for the impeachment of former president Dilma Rousseff in the Executive Power. While the clauses are enhanced by the semantic field of addition, nidifications are formed by enhancing clauses to give more information and strengthen the writer's arguments about the topic.

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Appendix 1

Three parallel lines (|||) are used to signal the beginning and the end of a clause complex, whereas two parallel lines (||) are used to separate one clause from another in the same clause complex.

POLÍTICA

Por que sou a favor do impeachment?

Carlos Eduardo Sell, doutor em sociologia e professor da UFSC, explica os motivos que o levam a defender o impedimento da presidente Dilma Rousseff

16/04/2016 - 08h03 - Atualizada em: 16/04/2016 - 08h34

Por Redação NSC

|||O impedimento é remédio constitucional amargo para a proteção do Estado Democrático de Direito. ||| Ele nasce da convicção [[de que um governo representativo existe sob a égide da lei]]. ||| Na feliz expressão de Norberto Bobbio, o Estado Democrático de Direito é sempre uma ordem "per lege" e "sub lege".|||

||| A atual mandatária violou essa ordem duplamente. ||| Em 1o lugar, em sua fonte,|| pois as eleições [[que a levaram ao poder, || hoje sabemos ||, foram fraudadas com dinheiro ilícito]]. ||| A 2a violação ocorre no âmbito do seu exercício, ou seja, de seu *modus operandi*, || pois mesmo um governo [[eleito de forma legítima (com maioria dos votos)]] não recebe o direito [[de delinquir]]. ||| É justamente por esses motivos [[que existe o instituto constitucional do impedimento]]. ||| Ele só revoga o sagrado mandato popular || quando e porque o governante se colocou ao arrepio da lei [[que jurou manter || e proteger]].|||

||| A bem da verdade, o processo de impedimento em curso na Câmara julgará apenas uma parcela ínfima de uma montanha de crimes. ||| É [[o que dizem palavras [[que se tornaram, tristemente, senso comum, como "mensalão" e "petrolão".]]]] ||| Neste sentido, a acusação em curso incide apenas no aspecto do exercício do governo e [[no que diz respeito a uma conduta bastante específica]]. ||| A condenação por crime de responsabilidade, em atenção aos artigos 85 e 167 da Constituição, é exigência [[que decorre em virtude da violação da Lei de Responsabilidade Fiscal, e conforme previsão do artigo 5 da Lei 1.079 de 1950]]. ||| Se lembrarmos || que Collor foi deposto por causa de um Fiat Elba, || esse crime está longe [[de ser menor]]. ||| Primeiro, porque qualquer violação da lei nunca é fato banal. ||| Segundo, porque a proporção [[em que a prática foi utilizada no governo Dilma Rousseff supera tudo [[que já foi realizado anteriormente em volume e extensão]]]]. ||| Por fim, tal prática foi utilizada || para enganar o povo brasileiro || e assim vencer as eleições. ||| Ela foi um instrumento de fraude premeditada. Portanto, mesmo que fiquemos restritos ao âmbito jurídico das

pedaladas fiscais, || ainda assim podemos corroborar as palavras de Janaina Paschoal || quando diz || que "sobram motivos", || pois é do império da lei [[que se trata]]. ||| Em outros termos, é do coração da democracia [[que estamos falando]]. Isso tudo já basta. |||

||| No entanto, o processo constitucional e, por isso, legítimo, de afastamento não é somente jurídico, || mas também político. ||| Sem jamais prescindir da fonte material do direito, || sabem os parlamentares || que os demais crimes praticados, || que envolvem, inclusive, obstrução da justiça, || também devem e podem ser ponderados formalmente no âmbito de uma consciência moralmente responsável, || motivando sua decisão || e instruindo seu julgamento íntimo. ||| A não ser, é claro, que o STF também queira || caçar nossa consciência moral. || Pois golpe é [[irrigar sua campanha com dinheiro ilícito]]. ||| Golpe é [[macular o Congresso com compra de votos]]. ||| Golpe é [[cobrar propina em licitações corrompidas.]] ||| Golpe é [[dilapidar a Petrobras com esse fim]]. ||| Golpe é [[tentar proteger um acusado pela justiça com status de ministro.]] ||| Golpe é [[constituir um governo paralelo em um quarto de hotel de luxo]]. ||| É verdade [[que o impedimento não é recall || e falta de governabilidade não o fundamenta]]. || Mas também é verdadeiro [[que a falta de legitimidade [[que nasce da violação sistemática e contumaz da lei, sim.]] |||]] É nesse contexto [[que as pedaladas fiscais se inserem]]. ||| É por isso [[que o senso de justiça dos cidadãos, || manifesto em massivas manifestações populares||, clama por providências || e a ordem constitucional grita pela aplicação do corretivo necessário]]. |||

||| Caso aprovado, || o afastamento da presidente não significa a redenção da política ou a instauração do paraíso da moralidade na terra. Mas quem disse || que se trata disso? ||| Por que eles ainda ofendem a sabedoria popular? ||| Trata-se apenas [[de afastar do caminho aqueles [[que, além da República, roubaram nossa esperança || e querem || que nos convençamos || que são um mal menor]]. ||| Infelizmente, eles não são. ||| Não tenhamos medo. ||| Afastá-los [[é só o primeiro passo de uma luta [[que está apenas começando.]] |||