When Countries come out to Play:
the metaphor of game in international relations

Quando Países Saem para Jogar:
a metáfora do jogo nas relações internacionais.

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1. Introduction

Before embarking to the Second World War's "D Day", United States' general George S. Patton delivers a speech to his troops in England, 1944. In one of its most quoted excerpts, Patton states that "this stuff" about "America wanting out of this war" is but "a crock of bullshit [sic]": Americans "loves the sting and clash of battle". So, Patton continues, "you [soldiers] are here today" because "you want to defend your homes", "you would not want to be anywhere else", and "you are real men and real men like to fight". Patton explains the last idea saying that "when you (…) were kids, you all admired the champion marble player, the fastest runner, the toughest, boxer, the big league ball players, and the All-American football players". So, American plays to win all the time, and that's why Americans have never lost nor will ever lose a war: "the very idea of losing is hateful to an American" (PATTON, 2006, p.449).

One could easily imagine the thrill triggered by Patton's words among his troops. The force of his statements is aggressively stimulating, with strong appeals to manhood, sustained by easily understandable imagery. Interestingly, war does not remember sports in Patton's speech. War is not even like a sport. War *is* sport, and Americans *plays to win*. Thus, Patton's discourse is representative of how games are *metaphors* that shape the way events are represented and practiced in international relations. This is self-evident in some cases, like in wars; but things can also be subtle, like in the way World Trade Organization's debates are theoretically labeled "rounds" of international market's "continuous game".

Patton's discourse is not alone. Prussian chancellor Otto Von Bismarck used to compare XVIII century's Europe diplomacy to a chessboard. Being himself a professional chess player, United States' former stateman Zbigniew Brzezinski labeled petropolitical disputes in Eurasia as "the grand chessboard". Arthur Conolly, British intelligence officer, called struggles between the British Empire and the Russian Empire in Central Asia as "the great game", an expression brought to public by Rudyard Kilping's novel "Kim". All of these examples mean that internationalists must be aware of how games are strongly evoked by theorists, thinkers and decision-makers. Efforts of *explanation*, *evaluation*, *interpretation* and even *judgment* are required there: metaphors are not a mere matter of expression, but a deep process of reality-making in international relations that must be scientifically approached.

Despite the apparent complexity of the task, it could be easily performed through a *sociolinguist* approach, because of its assertions about the role of langue and society in the making, remaking and un-making of reality.

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So, the objective of the present essay is to elaborate a sociolinguist discussion about how games can constitute and be constituted by international relations. Metaphors are considered here as important elements to understand what international relations are, and how international relations have been shaped. General Patton's discourse is briefly analyzed in order to give basis to the theoretical debate here developed. Research suggestions and possible further steps are also discussed in the last section.

2. Games and Reality

Games are deeply present in many explanations and representations of international relations, especially in theories that strive to explain them. The most common example of this is the "game theory", where games are related to rationalization of variables, predictability, strategic modeling, and economic concepts. Game theory should be taken by those who want a "rationalist" approach of the international relations; meanwhile, discourse analysts may benefit from a *sociolinguist* point of view, where langue and its tools – including metaphors – play an important role in the building of society.

In a sociolinguistic perspective, reality is created through social processes of linguistic interaction. Talking, listening, and arguing are the way men build, rebuild and un-build their own worlds. Things like countries, borderlines and people come from universal consensuses about social values like sovereignty, security, identity and self-determination, for instance. These consensuses are made and un-made through langue, what means that studying international reality is a matter of studying how values, identities, or even rationality is produced by communication and expression.

The most common linguistic tools of reality-building are *metaphors*, defined by Paul Ricoeur as the process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality (RICOEUR, 2004, p.5). The verb *to be* plays an important role here: metaphors work not by comparing two things, but by affirming that something *is* something else. These linguistic constructions have a strong impact over human reality, considering the theoretical perspective that society is organized through the way reality is linguistically organized and understood in human mind.

So it happens in international relations. When countries come out to play, games are metaphorically evoked to explain and understand reality; and this is precisely the moment when games are allowed to structure or to restructure the way reality is build. As a result, there is no way of saying who came first, reality or the metaphor of game. It means that internationalists must leave this duality: metaphor *is* reality, and reality *is* metaphor – or, more specifically, *games are reality*, and *reality is games*. So, studying reality is a matter of studying the metaphors that gives it meaning and, by consequence, its very existence.

2.1 Definition of game

But what is exactly a game? And what implication does it has on social reality? Johan Huizinga's *homo ludens* theory may be a pertinent starting point to answer these questions. According to Huizinga, games are not a biological phenomenon or a psychological effect, but a *socially significant* function that gives meaning to action and interaction (HUIZINGA, 2000, pp.1-2 – our emphasis). In a sociolinguistic perspective, it means that understanding social reality can be a matter of explaining it in terms of a game; and living social reality demands to use these understandings as a guide for "score better" in the "game of life".

Huizinga says it is difficult to define games by their logic. For instance: "funny" is not present in some games, while it is easily found in events that are not games. That's why, instead of a schematic definition, Huizinga prefers to define games through what he calls their "most common attributes". In other words, instead of logical rationalization,

Huizinga prefers to define games by what have been socially agreed about them. This is a particularly useful approach for a sociolinguistic perspective.

According to Huizinga, games are *voluntary activity* above all. Players accept the match simply because it is their will. Games are also *uninterested*. Their matters are "extraordinary", having no relation to the common worries of everyday life. Games also need to be *limited*. It demands chronological and spatial limits in order to be properly characterized. *Tension* is also a relevant gaming element. It derives from the competition that antagonizes players and mobilizes them. And finally, games must have a set of *rules*. Playing activity must be bounded by notions of what can be done and what cannot be (HUIZINGA, 2000, pp.5-7).

These traits – *voluntary activity*, *lack of interest*, *limitation*, *tension*, *rules* – have been consensually appointed as the main characteristics of the game. A glance on a chess match should be enough to perceive this: it is a voluntary activity, where two players are completely isolated from the everyday worries, struggling to win in an event explicitly bounded by the board and by the game's rules. Internationalists could benefit from Huizinga's theory in the search for the metaphors of game. It allows them to detect gaming elements in different works of communication, like declarations, statements, or even movies. By the way, such is the beautiful of discourse analysis: the way it makes use of unexpected fonts like newspapers and academic debate allows the researcher to unfound facts that would be ignored by classics approaches.

3. The game of discourse

Huizinga's definitions sound particularly interesting and useful when games are taken as *discourses*. Based on Samuel Berger and Peter Luckmann (2003), together of Cynthia Hard and Nelson Phillips (2002), discourses are defined here as social *constructors* made from an assemblage of socially available ideas, values, ethics, and so forth. In other words, discourses comprehend all social consensuses that build reality. Thus studying international relations is a matter of studying the discourses that gives them meaning, logic, coherence and even existence.

Understanding discourses as constructors implies that discourses build and are built by social interaction. The dependent-and-independent-variables scheme does not suit here: it does not matter who came first, but how exactly they work together. There is no reality beyond conventions made by men; and there are no men beyond conventions that give reality its existence. Human reality is not biological, natural or objective, but strictly human: order and its derivatives comes uniquely from human activity (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 2003, p.76). In other words: international relations is described as a game not because of its inherent characteristics. It is all but a matter of sufficiently consistent social consensuses about the definition of a game, as well as about the definition of international relations.

Members of a society – for instance, states in international relations – need to make effusive use of socially available discourses in order to be understood. This is absolutely vital, considering the hypothesis that human existence cannot be understood or even is possible out of society. A well socialized individual is obliged to explain the functioning and eventual malfunctioning of his world through the socially established knowledge (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 2003, p.92). There are a number of reasons to believe that the game metaphor is a relevant part of this socially established knowledge: again, a glance on United Nation's statements could give a good hint about this fact.

The main objective of these interactive efforts are essentially *political*, or the *recognition of power*. Based on Michel Foucault's assertions about the "order of the discourse" (1971), it could be possible to say that this recognition of power would allow one to state what is true, real, fair, rational or important – and this is what power essentially means in a sociolinguist perspective. In order to obtain this recognition, society's members *manipulate* discourses. Some manipulating tools includes associations, comparisons and, of course, metaphors. The success of these discursive strategies depends on how society is going to receive these manipulations. Considering how games are deeply present in the international reality's repertory, one very available manipulation is to explain international relations as a game;

to enlist their rules; and to complain about how these rules – conventions and treatises, for instance – have been violated or bypassed by some "dishonest" players that must be punished somehow.

How exactly discourses are shared, manipulated, and expressed? For sociolinguistics, the answer is in the *langue*, because there is nothing beyond society, and there is no society beyond langue. Langue plays two important roles. First, it allows communication; and second, it structures the way reality is organized and understood in human collective mind. So, understand how discourses work is a matter of understand how language works in its structural and communicational functions. An adequate explanation for both of them could be found on Ferdinand de Saussure's *linguistic course*. Before went to the course, it must be added that the present approach is *textual*: texts are considered here as the way langue allows synchronizing different zones of everyday life, making it possible to build a reality filled with common meanings, considering the textual capacity of overcoming the "here and now" and linking together different realities (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 2003, p.59).

3.1 Games and linguistic

In brief terms, Saussure (1995) says that all languages share a common *structure* that is above grammatical and vocabulary particularities. This structure is called *sign*: a symbolic aggregation composed by something perceived in reality – the *signified*; and a symbol, a gesture, a draw, a sound or whatever used to refer to the signified – the *signifier*. Once together, signified and signifier builds the sign, whose meanings are *dialectically* constructed in contrast to other sign, in an apparently contradictory process of *relativity* that establishes a situation of *complementarily* and *rejection* between them.

Signs compose among themselves the *dyads* that build reality. Examples of them abound in international relations: national and international; war and peace; sovereignty and intervention; north and south; west and east. In the same way, the definition of "game" is obtained when it is compared to something considered as a "no-game". Like in every dyad, there is an evident *value judgment* in this process: "game" is considered positive, while "no-game" – or *seriousness* – is defined as negative and undesirable (HUIZINGA, 2000, p.34).

Arbitrariness is also present in the sign: all efforts to characterize a "game" are not made of objectiveness or empirical observation, but from the discursive efforts to build social consensus towards a specific definition. It means that, when dealing with games as metaphors, internationalists are not going to face something like a natural or objective reality; instead, they are going to work on the consensus that gives meaning to this reality – and, by extension, its own "objective" existence.

As told, it could be difficult to define game's exclusive characteristics. In the long run, it could mean that it is simply impossible to define what is "game" and what is "serious": although it is somehow clear that they are different, there is no exact ways to know how this difference works, where it can be found, or even what exactly distinguish them. That's why definitions may not go beyond the arbitrariness of the discourse: "game" is "game" simply because there is a socially relevant consensus over the matter. It does not mean, however, that games are perfectly isolated from something "real", or "non-ludic". Again, reality is game, and game is reality.

4. The characteristics of discourse

Huizinga's concepts about games, once combined with the proposed sociolinguistic approach, are compatible to the main discursive characteristics pointed by Michel Foucault (1962): *heterogeneity* and *contradiction*. According to Foucault, discourses are heterogeneous because they are made from a myriad of different statements. More precisely, as put by Norman Fairclough (1996), discourses are composed by other discourses – *interdiscursivity* – and other texts – *intertextualitiy* – that gives them shape and meaning. Such eclecticism leads the discourse to the point of

extreme contradictions, because heterogeneity implies in joining together paradoxal claims. It means discourses must be analyzed precisely through their contradictions: paradoxes are not fails, but the very essence of the discourse (FOUCAULT, 1962).

Yet, as put by Claudio Lomnitz (2001), discourses also have mechanisms to build coherence. These mechanisms are called *deepness* and *silence*. Both of them work in synergy: discourses build their meanings by silencing their contradiction, what allows them to obtain deep consistence in their arguments. That's why it could be much more relevant to go beyond *what is said* and figure out *what is not said*. Implications of the discourse must not stop in what is explicit: internationalists are not only allowed but sometimes even morally obliged to identify the indirect implications of a discursive building. It can be done with a pertinent theoretical frame, together of some efforts of *evaluation* and *interpretation*.

Back to Huizinga's *homo ludens*, things finally get clear: as a linguistic sign, games make sense when compared with something considered as a "no-game"; nevertheless, the already mentioned difficulties to judge what is "game" and what is "serious" allow presuming that there is not such boundary: game is seriousness, and seriousness – or *reality* – is game. Metaphors probably are the sole responsible for the break up on the boundary between game and no-game: international relations is explained as a game and then organized as a game, in a contiguous process where metaphors do not explain or illustrate reality, but *are* reality.

Considering games' heterogeneity, it is not hard to figure out that their characteristics are possibly derived from "no-game" discourses. It means that games' main characteristics – *voluntary activity*, *lack of interest*, *limitation*, *tension* and *rules* – may have been extracted from other types of "serious" social interactions, up to the point of extreme contradictions. Here a number of possibilities could be imagined. For instance, "rules" may have been borrowed from laws; tension could be inspired by the thrill of hunting; and so forth. It does not mean discourses are faded to fail: as said, discourses must be analyzed through these contradictions, because there is nothing beyond them. However, like every discourse, analysts must always be aware that games strive to keep its coherence by silencing their paradoxes. It can be easily verified in General Patton's discourse.

5. Patton Comes to Play: War as Game

Now on Patton's discourse. Interestingly, the way the general builds the meaning of war is surprising akin to the features Huizinga attributes to games. In the beginning of his discourse, Patton starts his strategy by suggesting the *voluntary activity* of war. According to him, Americans were going to combat because there was no other thing they wanted to do. In other words, war is a voluntary activity, just like in Huizinga's game theory. Next, Americans were fighting because they love the thrill of sportive competition. Here a comparison is done between the *tension* of the game and the thrilling uncertainties of the war, making combat sounds somewhat playful.

Patton also establishes *limits* to the game by suggesting that only "real men" want to fight. This is a strategy that gives war an *uninterested* and *extraordinary* characteristic: far from politics or whatever, Americans fight to prove their manhood, or their skills as players. Finally, Patton affirms that Americans were fighting because they love the best American sportive champions, like boxer fighters, or All-American football players. For Patton, war is sportive competition above all: he speaks to the soldiers almost as a coach give instructions to a team.

Patton's discourse is deepened at the cost of relevant silences. First, it could be hard to find something like voluntary activity in war. Conscription is compulsory; a citizen who is enlisted to war and denies fighting may suffer legal and social penalties. Next, any comparison between the joyful tension of a game and the harsh tension of a war could be questionable. Of course there are possibilities of finding pleasure in the risks of battle. As told by a journalist, war could be pleasant – and addictive – as a drug. However, probably this sensation certainly is not the same one that makes a baby cry in pleasure, as told by Huizinga. By the way, Huizinga should have pointed out

another social consensus about games: they demand peace and agreement, like in the Olympic Games.

Furthermore, to say that war is for "real men" is to ignore the important role women also play in warring events. Feminist theories of international relations may agree that women have relevant participation in wars by making weapons, nursing, helping, caring, deciding, cheering, and of course fighting. Finally, comparing war to sports demands a morbid sense of humor. How to score in such a game? One possible answer could come from Patton's own words: "I want you to remember that no bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. You won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country" (PATTON, 2006, p.449). In other words: to kill is to score. Could it be possible to imagine a crowd paying for tickets and cheering in such a mortal game? Fortunately, it seems that scenes like this are still restricted to the most pessimistic sci-fi works.

Although somehow brilliant, Patton is not exactly an innovator: according to Huizinga, defining war as "games" probably is a habit as old as the existence of both words (HUIZINGA, 2000, p.67). In metaphorical terms, it could be easy to imagine comparisons between these events. Technical apparatus and fighting conditions may act as "rules"; conquests and lootings could be labeled "prizes"; war possibly makes much more sense when simplified to the idea of a "duel"; and so forth. By the way, it worth to check how Patton describes what an Army is: "an Army is a team. It lives, sleeps, eats, and fights as a team" (PATTON, 2006, p.451).

In sum, the main discursive strategy of Patton's discourse – as well as the main source of its polemics, aside the bad words – is the way it deeps the comparison between war and game. The most morally questionable feature of Patton's speech certainly is the way he states metaphorically that war is sport: as put ironically by a certain videogame main theme, "war has never been so much fun" as in Patton's warring world. What consequences could have such a discursive construction? This is another task addressed to the internationalists.

6. Conclusion: Explanation, Description, Simulation

Like all discursive edifications, Patton's speech builds its deepness at the cost of some silences that demands to be discursively analyzed. As seen, it was done here through a theoretical perspective that some discourse analysts like Tzvetan Todorov (1982) would call *exegesis*: the interpretation of a discourse based on ethical parameters. Of course this is not the only available way of performing discourse analyses. They may be done through a philosophical and even an aesthetical perspective. However, some may prefer to establish that political aims underlie all discursive strategies, as suggested by Norman Fairclough (1996). These are choices that deeply depend on the discourse analyst's objectives and perspectives.

Not importing their specific objectives and interests, discourse analysts probably are going to face three ways of approach: *explanation*, *simulation*, and *description*. The main differences among them are the way they create reality, and their available sources of statements. Explanation occurs when games are used to explain certain events of the international relations. Examples may be found in articles, essays, or broader debate in media. Description is present in every effort of schematic abstraction of reality. Analysts may find it in international relation's manuals, theories, economic models, historic researches, and so forth. Simulation tries to represent reality through models in order to understand it. They are present in war exercises, maps, and even video or board games.

Whatever in the form of explanation, simulation or description, games is always "for real". Internationalists must have always in mind that metaphors are not a representation of reality: metaphors *are* reality. Langue has a constituent role in this process: it does not simulate, explain, or descript international relations, but *are in fact* international relations. Considering this, interesting ways of building reality can be found in the way the second Gulf War was described by media as the "video game wars"; in the essence of the war exercises performed by some Armies; in the metaphors that are worldwide present in literature. Besides war and security, attention must be given to the jurisdictional sphere: as said by Huizinga, the metaphor of game is also very present there. A special heed

must also be paid to commercial and economic affairs, since the metaphor of game has been effusively evoked to explain, describe and even simulate them.

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Abstract

The paper discuss about the role of game metaphors in the international reality. It suggests for this a sociolinguist theoretical schema where metaphors are constructors of international relations. It briefly analyzes USA's general George Patton discourse with the suggested theoretical schema. Possible research development is also suggested.

Resumo

O artigo discute o papel das metáforas do jogo na realidade internacional. Sugere para isso um esquema teórico sociolinguístico, onde as metáforas são consideradas como construtoras das relações internacionais. O artigo analisa brevemente o discurso do general estadunidense George Patton com o esquema teórico sugerido. Possíveis desdobramentos também são sugeridos.