

FACE AND (IM)POLITENESS IN TERMS OF ADDRESS USED IN ONLINE NEWS AND FAKE NEWS

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Abstract:

In digital space, users engage in interactive mediated experiences to meet a human ‘compulsion of proximity’ (Boden & Molotch, 1994), while being expected to follow a certain ‘netiquette’ (Shea 1994). Nonetheless, there is still a gap when considering the proximisation (Cap 2006, 2006, 2013, 2022, Kopytowska 2018, 2022) and (im)politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, cf. Wieczorek, 2008, Korostenskienė, 2020 for a correlation of the two) employed on (dis)information media. According to the selection criterion within health, science, and well-being discourse domains, this paper focuses on the analysis of terms of address used in eight Portuguese corpora of online news websites (particularly, Diário de Notícias, Público, Sábado and Visão) and websites labelled as fake news producers (namely Altamente, Lusojournal2015/Lusoamanhecer, Magazine Lusa, and Vamos Lá Portugal), following Pena’s (2018, 2019) classification. On the one hand, the research findings show that news websites barely use the personal pronouns tu (→ ‘you’) and você (→ ‘you’) as informal terms of address to avoid being impolite or threatening the hearer’s/reader’s face. On the other hand, on fake news outlets, the larger use of tu (→ ‘you’) and você (→ ‘you’) could be regarded as potential face-threatening acts, despite being mainly used as (inter)personal and/or emotional proximisation strategies. Proximising through (im)politeness, all corpora also use first-person plural pronouns, displaying a tendency to include the hearer(s)/reader’s.

Keywords: Proximisation; Politeness; Online news; Disinformation; Health and science fake news.