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The Power of Violent Language in Everyday Life

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Abstract
This contribution examines the performative power of violent language in everyday life, linking classical pragmatics (Austin; Goffman) to contemporary hate speech and (cyber)stalking. It integrates official statistics and national/international monitoring with illustrative excerpts from criminal-court judgments to demonstrate the illocutionary and perlocutionary effects on control, subordination and withdrawal from the public sphere. The analysis shows how threats and blackmail operate as discursive instruments of power and discusses implications for screening, safety planning, platform governance and media literacy.

Keywords: *Gender-based violence; Violent language; Hate speech; Cyberstalking; online communication.*

1. Introduction

In an interpretative perspective of linguistic interaction, work offers a sociological reflection on the relationship between violent experiential reality and its linguistic representation. In our case, this reflection will focus on specific communicative acts. As is well known, the violent "use" of language is not just a manifestation of violence, but it also contributes to the construction of a "staging" – to use Ervin Goffman's term - of meanings that profoundly influence behaviour and social dynamics. Our reflection considers verbal violence as a performative element, which transforms everyday interactions into "scenes", where words act through socially shared meanings and are then turned into actions. These verbal actions are often intended to strengthen social hierarchies, establish identities and roles through the management of impressions in order to maintain a shared definition of the situation (Goffman 1959).

In their everyday interactions, individuals rely on contextual practices (indexicality) to attribute meaning to words and actions: "(…) the performative utterance as not, or not only merely, saying something, but doing something, as not a true or false report of something" (Austin 1962: 25). As a result, the violent use of language becomes a performative and situational tool – as argued in Judith Butler's *Excitable Speech* (2021) -

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capable of reinforcing social expectations and legitimising forms of control, subordination and discrimination both in online contexts and in everyday life.

In the area of gender violence, for example, we can think of harassment acts such as stalking, i.e. the set of substantially different - verbal and non-verbal - obsessive and harassing attitudes of an individual who persecutes, "pursues" another through harassment implemented - in some cases - through verbal aggression, phone calls, messaging and anonymous letters. These harassment acts are considered predictors or "warning-light crimes" of gender-based violence as they are likely to be symptomatic expressions of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence directed against a person because she is a woman. A harassment act features three typical elements: the presence of a harasser, the presence of a victim and the existence of a relationship between them characterised by control over the latter and causing great anxiety and fear in the victim. The complexity of this phenomenon, which is not limited to a single action, but includes a variety of behaviours with different purposes, manifestations and consequences, makes it difficult to give an accurate legal definition. Another example of verbal violence is hate speech, directed, face-to-face or through the media, against individuals or entire sections of the population. This phenomenon, amplified by online communication, develops as a form of power exerted through language against women, foreigners, LGBTQIA+ individuals, believers of other religions, the disabled, etc. Hate speech, a "moving concept" (Bentivegna e Rega 2020) defined and redefined in terms of the cultural, political, social and communicative context where it is found, is a phenomenon that finds in the internet its ideal environment: in the absence of mediation, filters and (self) censorship, sexist comments and threats, racist insults and homophobic attacks proliferate (Bianchi 2021). Here, too, the use of violent language is a "script" which consolidates social roles and power relations and is used by social actors to create and negotiate reality.

Although they are different phenomena, of course, with stalking targeted and personalised, whereas hate speech can be generic and aimed at social groups or categories, both hate speech and stalking (in the digital context in particular, where cyber-stalking, for instance, refers to a person repeatedly sending unwanted emails or text messages to their victims) are characterised by repeated behaviour aiming to harass or intimidate, and share a common goal: to exert power and control over the victim. Both can also have a considerable psychological impact and can lead to anxiety, depression, loss of self-esteem and significant changes in the victim's lifestyle. They can also converge as in the case of gender-based cyber violence**,** where sexist or misogynistic language is used to control and humiliate victims. Stalkers may use hate speech to attack their victims in personal terms, thus increasing the emotional impact of their harassment.

Finally, in both phenomena, as we will see in the next paragraph, women make up the largest percentage of victims.

Table no. 1 - Stalking vs Hate Speech

DIMENSION	STALKING / CYBERSTALKING	HATE SPEECH
TARGET	Individual - typically an ex-partner/partner	Individuals or groups (gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability)
MODALITY	Repeated contact, monitoring/control, threats, blackmail; online/offline	Insults, threats, public denigration; high online amplification
LEGAL FRAMING	Offence targeted at a person	Often covered by provisions on discrimination/incitement/hatred (according to jurisdiction)
TYPICAL PERLOCUTIONARY EFFECTS	Fear, hypervigilance, habit change, isolation	Fear, self-censorship, withdrawal from the public sphere, stigmatisation
INTERSECTIONS	Use of hate speech during instances of persecution	Targeted campaigns against individual women/public figures

Bianchi (2015: 116) highlights how in the analytic tradition of the philosophy of language, there are two historical approaches. The first, stemming from the twentieth-century tradition of the philosophy of ideal language, considers language as a tool for representing reality and transmitting information. The second, arising from the philosophy of ordinary language of the same period, highlights the performative dimension of language, in other words its ability to create, transform and consolidate social realities: language thus becomes a means of regulating social life and spreading ideologies. These two approaches reflect different views of the relationship between language and reality, in particular social reality. On the one hand, language - as a mirror of society – can only reflect social inequalities and represent phenomena such as sexism, racism and homophobia which exist in our communities. On the other hand, language is considered a constitutive element of social injustice: through language, people contribute to generating and reinforcing these inequalities, since linguistic practices are deeply intertwined with social ones.

This paper offers a reflection on the "power" of the use of violent language in shaping social reality. If we consider hate messages, for instance, they do not simply describe a condition, but actively affect it, contributing to the production of meanings that determine the way in which we live and interact in our social context. In the first part, summarising some of the most recent national and international reports, this paper outlines data which show the proliferation of hate speech in online spaces and the increase in instances of harassment in recent years. The pervasiveness of this phenomenon will allow us to reflect on the power exerted by language in modifying experience. Finally, we will take up some of J.L. Austin's observations on the pragmatic nature of language, reassessing them in the light of some contents taken from court sentences following stalking and harassment crimes.

2. Data and methods

This contribution is primarily theoretical - conceptual and includes an empirical component for illustrative purposes. It first draws on secondary sources of an institutional and para-institutional nature - reports by ministries and statistical authorities, national and supranational watchdogs and civil-society organisations with established monitoring expertise. Source selection followed three criteria: (1) coverage (prevalence at the national/European level); (2) recency (priority to recent editions); and (3) methodological transparency (availability of operational definitions and technical notes). For each figure cited in the text, the year and source are explicitly indicated.

The empirical component consists of brief excerpts from judicial decisions concerning offences linked to violent language and coercive control (e.g., stalking/acts of persecution, mistreatment). These passages do not constitute a statistical corpus: they are typical cases used to illustrate the illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects of threatening or denigratory utterances concretely. Where necessary, quotations have been translated while preserving register and pragmatic value; all potentially identifying details have been removed or altered in line with ethical principles and the protection of the parties involved.

Analytically, the study adopts a qualitative–pragmatic approach. Utterances are interpreted through speech-act theory - with particular attention to the illocution/perlocution nexus - and Goffman's approach in terms of roles, frames and the organisation of interaction. A minimal thematic coding scheme (devaluing insults; threats;

blackmail/deprivation; justification of violence) was applied to structure the material. Two main limitations are acknowledged: judicial excerpts are illustrative rather than representative; and secondary statistics are affected by cross-source differences in definitions, coverage and periodicity. These constraints are made explicit and are taken into account when interpreting the findings.

2.1 Data related to gender-based violence

In order to analyse the phenomenon with particular consideration of its impact on women's lives, we report below some data, which show its proliferation all over Italy.

Data on stalking in Italy show a significant prevalence of female victims: in the three-year period 2021-2023, the incidence of female victims was practically unchanged, at between 74 and 75% in harassment cases, between 81 and 82% in cases of abuse by family members and cohabiting partners and with values around 91% in cases of sexual violence (Italian Ministry of the Interior 2024).

The 2021 Eurispes Italy Report shows that 9.3% of Italians experienced stalking, with women affected three times as much as men (14% against 4.5%). Young women between 18 and 24 years old are particularly vulnerable, accounting for 13% of victims. As for the perpetrators of the harassment, in 25.6% of cases this was the victim's former partner, followed by acquaintances (13%), friends (10.1%), current partners (7.9%), colleagues (6.9%) and relatives (5.1%). Despite the seriousness of the crime, only 13.7% of victims reported it to the authorities, leaving 86.3% of cases unreported (EURISPES 2021). In the first half of 2024, data from the Criminal Analysis Service of the Central Criminal Police Directorate indicate a 6% increase in harassment cases compared to the same period in the previous year, with women accounting for 74% of victims (Italian Ministry of the Interior 2023).

Monitoring by the Italian Institute of Statistics ISTAT (2024) on the use of the helpline for victims of gender-based violence and stalking (number 1522) notes physical violence as the "main" type of violence suffered by about half the victims (43.1%), followed by psychological violence (35%). If we consider the cases of victims who have suffered two or more types of violence, psychological violence is the one most associated with other forms of abuse. From the analysis of all the acts of violence reported, in addition to physical and psychological ones, threats (1,868) and harassment (867) stand out as the most frequent types, highlighting the importance of the helpline in the fight against stalking. The number of instances of economic violence reported is also significant (906).

It is well known that harassment taking place through the internet is increasing, consistently with the greater use of social networks in recent years (ISTAT, 2022). Within the digital ecosystem, "it is imperative to recognise that online hate clusters do not act in isolation from each other but build an effective and resilient ecosystem that connects the physical and digital worlds (Bartholini 2024). In the digital realm, groups operating on different platforms are interconnected and interdependent, similarly to those that characterise the physical world" (Senate of the Italian Republic, 2022). In general, women are predominantly the recipients of online hate speech and are at greater risk of online aggression and harassment on all social media (Jo Cox Commission, Camera dei Deputati 2017). At a European level, one in ten women aged 15 and over has been subjected to cyberviolence (ibid.). According to the VOX survey carried out in Italy (2022), in communications via X (formerly Twitter), women have been confirmed over the years to have been the targets of hate messages throughout Italy, with discriminatory dynamics increasing in conjunction with news of femicides and aggressions. The new edition of the

2022 Map of Intolerance, drawn up by the Vox Rights observatory, attests to the worrying levels of hate speech, above all through social media, which particularly affects women, people with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities. A key feature of the Map of Intolerance is the ability to geolocate tweets, thus creating a thermographic representation of intolerance. The "warmer" the colour of a specific area, the higher the concentration of hate tweets referring to a particular topic. It is important to point out that areas without thermographic marking do not necessarily indicate the absence of discriminatory content, but rather their lower impact compared to the national average. The percentage of negative tweets, i.e. containing hate content, rose from 69% in 2021 to 93% in 2022. This percentage increase highlights a progressive radicalisation of online communications, a sign of growing polarisation and of a strong prevalence of negative over positive language. The data collected show a precise cross-section of the groups most affected by these dynamics: women, once again, represent the most targeted cluster, with 43.21% of hate tweets directed at them, followed by people with disabilities (33.95%), the LGBTQIA+ community (8.78%), migrants (7.33%), Jews (6.58%) and Muslims (0.15%). The problem of online hate is not limited to Italy but represents a global issue. Several international studies show that digital violence and harassment are on the rise in all countries, with women and minorities bearing the brunt.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (2017) has found that women with disabilities and those belonging to ethnic or religious minorities are particularly affected by cyberviolence. The report points out that cyber-stalking can also have serious consequences in the offline world, putting the physical safety of victims at risk.

Research conducted by The Economist Intelligence Unit (2021) points out that digital misogyny is boosted by the anonymity afforded by digital platforms, making it increasingly easier for users to dish out insults and threats without fear of consequences. This creates a hostile environment for women, who are often forced to change their online behaviour so as to avoid becoming the targets of violence.

Amnesty International (2017) has conducted extensive research on the topic of online harassment, involving around 4,000 women aged between 18 and 55 in eight countries (Italy, Denmark, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United States). The results are alarming: 23% of the women interviewed said they had been the victims of online harassment or threats at least once, with the highest values in Italy (16%) and the United States (33%). Online violence has a significant impact on the victims' mental health: more than half the women (55%) reported periods of stress, anxiety and panic attacks. In addition, 76% of women have changed the way they use social media due to the threats they have received, with 32% stopping expressing opinions on specific topics to avoid further attacks.

The UN Women report (2021) denounces the effects of the pandemic on online violence, which has further limited women's participation in the public sphere. With the growing online presence caused by COVID-19 restrictions, women have increasingly been victims of violent language and behaviour, which not only marginalises them but also threatens their safety.

This brief outline of data tells us about an ever-growing situation of online violence characterised by increasingly marked radicalisation. The effects of digital hatred are not limited to the online context, but spill over into offline life, restricting the victims' freedom of expression and their participation in public life.

Although online platforms are the privileged frameworks where most of the violent conversations we know are expressed, they are the symptomatic projection of an offline reality.

2.2 «Come back with me or tomorrow you're dead ». Operating violence with words

In the context of linguistic violence, J.L. Austin's model of speech acts provides a fundamental interpretative key to understanding how language is not a mere way of describing, informing or communicating thoughts, but can also directly affect individuals and relationships. As Crespi writes (2005: 77) "the intimate relationship between action and language is at the heart of Austin's theory of speech acts. [...] He wants to highlight that, in certain situations, language itself is a form of action. […] He observes that when we utter words within a certain semantic and institutional context, we are in fact performing an action: to say is to do, to speak is to do things with words (see Austin, 1974: 5)[1]. Two elements are therefore relevant here: the context in which certain statements are uttered and the status or social position of the person who utters them".

Violence implemented through language, as analytically shown by philosopher Claudia Bianchi in her well-known book *Hate Speech. Il lato oscuro del linguaggio* (2021), occurs through words or expressions that not only convey offensive meanings, but carry out acts of aggression, humiliation or exclusion. Examples of this are the Incel communities[2], where insults, threats, hate speech and discriminatory language producing tangible effects on those who receive them are frequent. Austin teaches us that every utterance contains a specific intention: in the examples that follow, this intention is often to demean, ridicule or attack the dignity of the listener. Perlocutionary acts are very important in linguistic violence because they refer to the effects produced on receivers. Violent words generate psychological effects such as fear, shame, isolation or a sense of inferiority. In a context where they are repeated, these verbal acts can have lasting consequences on the receiver's emotional and psychological well-being, turning language into a tool of permanent harm.

Take, for example, insults and derision: these apparently descriptive acts work as demeaning performative ones. Illocutionary acts tend to exclude or discriminate, whereas perlocutionary ones can cause shame or humiliation, directly impacting upon the receiver's self-esteem. In the case of threats and intimidation, in these utterances illocutionary acts are

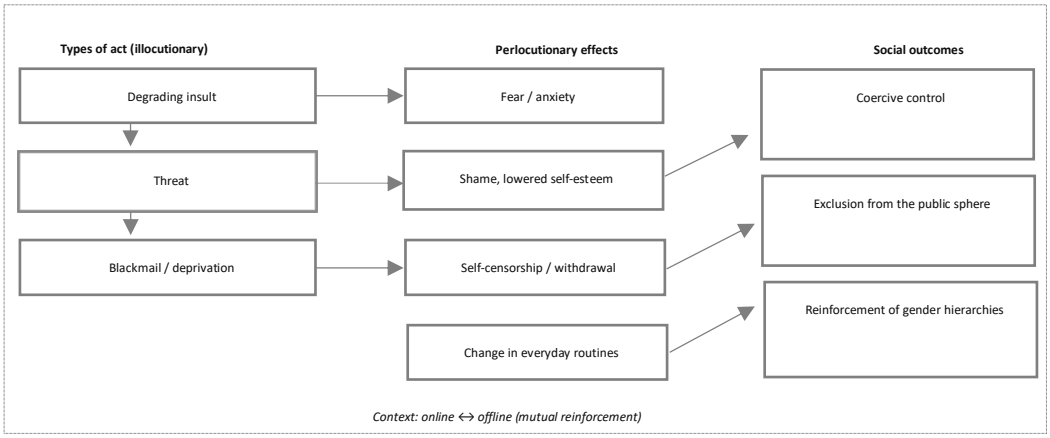
[1] The three types of statements proposed by J.L. Austin are divided into *locutionary*, which include several utterances with meaning (e.g., the door is open); *illocutionary*, which include both constative and performative clauses ("I declare that P", "I order you to close the door") and *perlocutionary*, which include all the utterances that produce effects on the listeners (e.g. carrying out an order) (Crespi 2005: 78-79). Austin (1962: 108) identifies, therefore, a series of actions that we take when saying something. These actions, taken together, perform a locutionary act, which is roughly equivalent to pronouncing a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, corresponding, in traditional terms, to the "meaning". Secondly, we can perform illocutionary acts, such as informing, ordering, warning, committing to do something, etc., i.e. statements that possess a specific (conventional) force. Thirdly, we can also perform perlocutionary acts, which are what we obtain or manage to do by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, retaining, and even surprising and deceiving.

[2] Incels (Involuntary celibates) belong to what has been called Manosphere, i.e. a varied set of groups made up only of men and, in most cases, characterised by strong feelings of anger and violence towards women (Dolce e Pilla 2019; Nagle 2018; Pizzimenti e Pasciuto 2022; Cava e Pizzimenti 2024).

aimed at instilling fear and submission. The perlocutionary effect aims to provoke fear and obedience by exploiting language in a manipulative way.

In this sense, violent language is configured as a tool that establishes hierarchies and legitimises dynamics of exclusion and subordination.

Table no. 2 - From illocutionary acts to social outcomes of violent language.



We will now consider some excerpts from three sentences for crimes of "stalking, abuse within the family and harassment".[3]

We know that the peculiarity of *gender-based violent crimes* is the fact that perpetrators usually do not accept the illegality of their conduct, considering violence as ordinary relational practice with their wives/partners and/or minor children, who are "their property" and from whom they do not allow any talking back. The sentences below allow us to consider not only the linguistic content, but also the speakers' intentions and the effects on the receivers. At this stage we will not delve into the individual court cases, as we are only interested in reflecting on how language "acts" when we are in the presence of examples of male violence against women.

"you're a whore, you're a bitch, a retard, you're dirty, you go with other men, you don't understand anything, you're dumb" and the like, in addressing her with threatening phrases such as "Husbands who kill their wives are right"

"you're a whore!", "you're a bitch, you don't understand anything!", "you're dumb!", while also demanding to have sex with her, despite her clear refusal.

[3] The following sections include quotations of offensive, sexist language and threats of violence drawn from judicial rulings. They are presented for analytical purposes, with anonymisation and due regard for the legal context. The cited rulings originate from Italian jurisdictions and were selected within the relevant time frame (Sentence dated 2023, No. 579; Sentence dated 2024, No. 8; Sentence dated 2023, No. 1610). The passages in quotation marks are taken from court documents and have been translated with the aim of preserving their illocutionary force (insult, threat, blackmail). Identifying details have been removed or modified in accordance with ethical principles and sensitivity toward the individuals involved.

"*you're a whore!", "You go with other men!".*
*...*you *ruin people ... don't complain if in the end there are femicides ... If you want a quiet life, let me be, otherwise you know what I'll do? I'll go to jail, but I'll kill her first*!"

"*come back with me or tomorrow you won't be around anymore"*
"*You have to come back with me, we have to be together. If you don't come back with me, I won't give you the keys*"

We can easily understand the explicit content of these sentences and the literal meaning of the words uttered. In these sentences, the content is explicitly offensive and demeaning, as these are insults, vulgar epithets and disparaging comments about the dignity, value and abilities of the person to whom they are addressed. Phrases such as "*you're a whore*" or "*you're dumb*" contain an explicit meaning that is derogatory and humiliating for the recipient. If we consider the communicative intention of the senders (the abusers, in this case) and the illocutionary act (the intention) that accompanies the utterances and often gives them a performative function, demeaning insults such as "*you're a whore*", "*you're dumb*", are not merely descriptive: they have the intention of belittling the recipients (the victims, in this case), denigrating their person and their value. Using insults generates an intention of humiliation that acts destructively on the recipient, compromising their self-esteem.

Threatening statements such as "*Husbands who kill their wives are right*" make the illocutionary act particularly aggressive and intimidating. The intention is not only to express a negative assessment, but also to create a climate of threat and fear, suggesting that violent punishment is acceptable or even justified. The same is true with requests for non-consensual sexual intercourse: these utterances contain illocutionary acts of coercion and imposition. The intent is to submit the recipients to the will of the speakers, regardless of their express refusal. Threatening utterances create an environment of terror and may cause fear of retaliation or physical violence in a person. This perlocutionary dimension is particularly relevant, because it acts as a controlling device, inducing real fear that forces the victim into a condition of submission and insecurity. The perlocutionary effect of utterances such as "*you're a whore*" and "*you go with other men*" is also a tool to control and manipulate a person's behaviour, putting pressure on them to comply with the speaker's wishes. In some contexts, these perlocutionary acts create in the recipients feelings of guilt or shame, which can lead them to change their behaviour in order to avoid further insults or aggressions.

The belittling and dehumanisation contained in expressions such as "*you're a bitch*" and "*you don't understand anything*" can produce psychological effects of humiliation, debasement and emotional isolation. The recipients are reduced to objects of contempt and the repetition of such statements tends to undermine their self-esteem and reinforce their sense of inferiority.

Furthermore, it should be noted that linguistic violence occurs in different forms and can take on tones of coercion, control and threat, as shown by the sentences: *Come back with me or tomorrow you won't be around anymore* and *You have to come back with me, we have to be together. If you don't come back with me, I won't give you the keys*. These expressions are clear examples where language is used as a tool to exert power and control over another person.

Come back with me or tomorrow you won't be around anymore, is an explicit threat. Its literal meaning is clear: if the recipient doesn't come back to the relationship with the

speaker, she will suffer serious consequences ("*you won't be around anymore*"), which could be interpreted as the promise of a violent act or as an allusion to death. The intention is to intimidate and force the recipient to obey. The statement leaves no room for freedom of choice; it is a coercive act, which uses fear as a means of persuasion. The effects of this utterance on the recipient can include a sense of panic, vulnerability and submission. It can also lead to resistance or seeking protection if the recipient perceives the threat as real.

From the point of view of linguistic violence, this utterance represents an act of extreme control. The explicit threat ("*tomorrow you won't be around anymore*") aims to psychologically destabilise a listener, leading her to fear for her safety.

You have to come back with me, we have to be together. If you don't come back with me, I won't give you the keys.

This sentence is more articulate in tone but is equally violent. The speaker states that the recipient must return to the relationship, emphasising that there is no other option ("*you have to*"). The second part of the sentence introduces a form of practical blackmail, linked to the possession of keys, probably of an essential item (for example, the house or a car). The speaker's intention is twofold: on the one hand, to impose the obligation to return to the relationship (emotional coercion) and on the other hand, to use the withdrawal of a material good as leverage. This is an example of an indirect threat, where the speaker exercises control by denying access to practical resources. The effects on the recipient can be manyfold and they, include feelings of helplessness and frustration. Blackmail creates a climate of anxiety and insecurity, leaving the recipient in a position of psychological and material dependence, limiting the victim's autonomy through a double mechanism: emotional pressure ("*you have to come back with me*") and practical coercion ("*I won't give you the keys*").

3. Limitations and Future Directions

Linguistic violence occurs in multiple shadowy ways, ranging from explicit threats to more subtle forms of coercion and blackmail. Recognising these dynamics is essential in order to address and combat gender-based violence, promoting relationships based on mutual respect and independence.

Although the sentences used above entered the courtrooms through the victims' complaints, they are also sadly common in journalistic reports and in the daily lives of women who, too often, do not report them because they are in adverse conditions.

However, it should be emphasised that the examples presented do not fully meet the criteria of a rigorous linguistic analysis or a specific methodology for the study of the contexts of gender-based violence through language. The judicial excerpts used have an explicitly illustrative function: they were selected to highlight pragmatic mechanisms and do not constitute a systematic corpus suitable for generalisable inferences. Secondly, the reported statistics are secondary sources produced by different entities; this entails potential definitional heterogeneity (e.g., in offence categories or units of analysis), not always fully comparable across time and space. Linguistically, the translations of excerpts not originally in Italian - while undertaken with attention to illocutionary force - may introduce a degree of semantic loss and cultural recontextualisation. Despite these premises, we believe that the content emerging from these "warning-light crimes" is crucial to implement daily practices that allow us to recognise when language is used as a tool of violence by abusive and coercing individuals.

This analysis points to a set of operational implications spanning service provision, digital platforms and education. From the point of view of health, social and justice

services, it is a priority to systematically integrate screening for threatening and coercive language into intake protocols and safety planning - probing not only explicit episodes of physical violence but also speech acts that establish coercive control and social isolation. Within this framework, orientation to existing support networks (e.g. dedicated helplines) should be proactive and structured, with referral and case-management procedures that account for the specificity of perlocutionary harms (fear, withdrawal, self-censorship) and the corresponding protection needs.

In terms of the platform ecosystem, there is a need for governance instruments that recognise the performativity of violent language rather than adopt a purely content-based interpretation. Desirable measures include simplified and timely reporting mechanisms for threats and doxxing, greater transparency around rule enforcement and procedures for preserving digital evidence to protect exposed individuals. These directions point to a co-regulatory approach in which public authorities, civil society and platform operators share standards, metrics and ongoing channels of dialogue, with an eye to international comparisons, as well.

In the educational and training spheres, a pragmatic perspective offers conceptual tools for fostering critical language literacy. Incorporating modules on illocutionary/perlocutionary acts, interactional frames and online-offline dynamics into school and professional curricula can facilitate early recognition of harmful communicative patterns and the acquisition of response competencies (documentation, help-seeking, privacy management and handling of evidence). In professional settings, continuing education for health, social and school personnel as well as law enforcement staff should include model cases and guidelines for assessing risk specific to linguistic threats and coercive inducements.

Recalling Crespi's words about Austin's analysis (2005: 78): *Two elements are therefore relevant here: the context in which certain statements are uttered and the status or social position of the person who utters them*. This prompts us to carefully consider not only the content of statements, but also the circumstances in which they are uttered and the role of those who utter them, fundamental elements for understanding the extent of linguistic violence.

Performative statements can "do something" if they meet certain "conditions of felicity", i.e., the appropriate context for linguistic cooperation. Linguistic violence consists of the intentional use of conditions of "infelicity", since the expressions do not abide by the rules of civil dialogue and communicative reciprocity. Offensive utterances are used in an uncooperative way in order to hurt, manipulate and create imbalances of power, demonstrating that linguistic violence not only violates conditions of felicity, but knowingly exploits the violation of these conditions to produce harmful effects.

In gendered dynamics, linguistic abuses are effective precisely because they violate ordinary cooperation - they disrupt turn-taking, invade privacy and threaten sanctions - and, through this violation, produce harmful perlocutionary effects (intimidation, dependency and self-censorship). In other words, what is "infelicitous" relative to conversational civility is felicitous relative to a coercive aim: the act is non-cooperative, yet effective as a technology of control. This clarification explains why threats, blackmail and harassment - especially when repeated - generate cumulative harm and transform interactional spaces into mechanisms for the government of conduct, with macro-level outcomes of exclusion and the reinforcement of gender hierarchies.

These statements are real examples of how language can be an instrument of coercion and domination. Let us conclude, therefore, by going back the concept of power

in the title of this paper. *Power* is the type of control that is exerted over the process of production, exchange and consumption of linguistic and material artifacts so that this process is consistent with the practice that produced it. In this perspective, the ruling class produces a series of discourses ("discursive practices") that act as a tool to measure the distance or closeness of the discourses that the actors subject to the same power could construct. In all cases - and precisely for these reasons - the universe defined by the dominant discursive practices does not allow one to depart from it beyond a certain degree (Carzo 1981: 68). In other words, even if the subjects are free to construct their own discourses, this freedom nevertheless "remains under supervision" (Barthes 1964).

The power of violent language is therefore the product of ego-syntonic voices, which subordinate without leaving room to linguistic disobedience and therefore to life.

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