

**NOMINALIZATIONS AS COMPLEX STRATEGIES  
OF POLITENESS AND FACE-WORK IN SCIENTIFIC  
PAPERS WRITTEN IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, we depart from the hypothesis that face-work is an important dimension of the construction of discourse, regardless the register (oral or written). Drawing on the framework of Pragmatics, we argue that instances of nominalization can operate as politeness strategies, in the sense that they permit, on the one hand, the omission of the actor/agent of a given verbal event and, on the other hand, they contribute to establishing the boundaries of social distance and power relations, as a pervasive feature of formal texts. The empirical data analyzed in this study include academic papers taken from the Academic Corpus of Brazilian Portuguese (CAPB). In the academic papers analyzed, nominalizations operated, to a large degree, as a strategy to mitigate the potential attacks on the positive face of the author himself, acting, therefore, as a strategy of positive politeness.

**Key-words:** nominalizations; politeness strategies and face-work.

**RESUME:** Dans cet article, nous partons de l'hypothèse que le processus de figuration (face work) est une dimension importante de la construction du discours, quel que soit leur type (oral ou écrit). Avec le cadre théorique de Pragmatique, nous soutenons que la nominalisation peut fonctionner comme des stratégies de politesse. Le nominalisation permet, d'une part, l'omission de l'acteur/agent d'un événement verbal donné et contribue, en outre, pour établir les limites de la distance sociale et les relations de pouvoir, qui sont une caractéristique présente dans les textes formels. Dans cette étude, nous avons étudié les articles scientifiques provenant de "Corpus Acadêmico do Português Brasileiro (CAPB)". Dans les études examinées, nominalisations agissent en grande partie comme une stratégie pour réduire les attaques possibles sur la face positif de l'auteur, agissant donc comme une stratégie de politesse positive.

**Mots-cles:** nominalisations; stratégies de politesse; processus de figuration (face work).

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**A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE STUDY**

Academic writing is lexically dense, and the fact that instances of nominalization are pervasive is widely accepted in the literature (HALLIDAY; MARTIN, 1993; MARTIN, 2008). From the point of view of Functional Systemic

Linguistics, nominalization instances are associated with the linguistic phenomenon termed 'ideological grammatical metaphors' (IGM) by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014).

IGM represent a shift from the more congruent form of language to a more abstract, or metaphorical mode (HALLIDAY; MARTIN, 1993; TAVERNIERS, 2003; 2006). More specifically, IGMs make it possible to replace a grammatical category (or structure) with another, for example, people "compare prices", as opposed to "price comparison". From this perspective, the resulting nominalized term is a 'metaphorical' form that presents a clausal counterpart (MENDONÇA; OLIVEIRA, no prelo ).

In this paper, we depart from the hypothesis that, in formal texts, particularly in academic papers, the use of nominalizations in instances of grammatical metaphors may contribute to the construction of a lexically dense text. The reason for this is that the interpersonal dimension of discourse, or the relation established between reader and author, is mediated by the scientific article, and by the scientific writing domain. The hypothesis of a relationship between the use of nominalizations and the degree of formality of the texts was already set forth by Brown and Levinson (1987). According to the authors, nominalizations give rise to greater formality in texts. The following three examples are used by Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 207) to illustrate their hypothesis:

- (a) You performed well on the examinations and were favorably impressed.
- (b) Your performing well on the examinations impressed us favorably.
- (c) Your good performance on the examinations impressed us favorably.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), (c) is the most formal statement, and it is akin to written texts, such as scientific papers, due to the nominalization of the verb 'to perform'. For the authors, the instance of nominalization renders a more formal statement, because "the more nouny an expression, the more removed an actor is from doing or feeling or being something; instead of the predicate being something attributed to an actor, the actor becomes an attribute (e.g. adjective) of the action.". The actor becomes an attribute (i.e. adjective) of the action" (BROWN; LEVINSON, 1987, p. 208). The use of nominalization avoids a direct confrontation between the interlocutors and, therefore, may function as a strategy of negative politeness.

From this perspective, face-work can be an important dimension of the construction of discourse, regardless of the text modality (oral or written). As the examples of Brown and Levinson (1987) show, lexical, syntactic and semantic properties, even of written texts, can find an explanation in the pragmatic

dimension of language in use.

Drawing on the framework of Pragmatics, as described earlier in the text, we argue that instances of nominalization can also operate as politeness strategies, in the sense that they permit, on the one hand, the omission of the actor/agent of a given verbal event and, on the other, they may contribute to establishing the boundaries of social distance and power relations, as a pervasive feature of formal texts.

From this pragmatic perspective, we will focus on the instances of nominalizations whose actor/agent is the producer of the text. As a strategy of negative politeness, the omission of the researcher, present in the nominalizations analyzed here, may contribute to softening the imposition of the research information (such as hypotheses, theoretical contributions, results, etc.) on the reader. As a result, the nominalizations may operate as an avoidance strategy (GOFFMAN, 1967), in which the discourse producer prevents himself from invading the reader's territory. However, as we will verify from the analysis carried in this paper, the role of the instances of nominalizations in scientific papers is highly complex, since they can also function as a strategy of positive politeness. From this viewpoint, nominalizations operate as hedges (expressions, or terms, that suggest posture or attitude, see FRASER, 2010).

That said, the focus of this paper is to speculate how nominalizations, whose verbal counterpart of agent is the researcher, may contribute to the co-construction of faces and territories (positive and negative faces, respectively). This phenomenon, we assume, is given prominence not only in dialogical texts, as it has been traditionally analyzed by the theories of politeness in general, but also in monologic texts, such as in scientific papers, since the faces of the interlocutors are also made salient in them.

The empirical data analyzed in this study include academic papers taken from the Academic Corpus of Brazilian Portuguese (CAPB, OLIVEIRA; MIRANDA, 2017), which had about 4.8 million words in the time of data collection (2015 and 2016). The corpus is currently under construction at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG, Brazil).

In the next section, we will briefly discuss the notions of politeness and face-work that underpin this study. Next, we will review the theories regarding the discursive role of hedges, in an attempt to relate them to the academic domain. Later in the text, the five most frequent instances of nominalization in our corpus will be analyzed from the perspective of the system of politeness, face-work, and strategies of politeness.

## **1. THE SYSTEM OF POLITENESS, FACE-WORK, AND STRATEGIES OF POLITENESS**

In the last four decades, several studies in the field of Pragmatics have shed light on the relevance of speech acts to the co-construction of identity or, as termed by Goffman's (1967), to face-work. From the pioneering approaches of Lakoff (1977), Leech (1983), and Brown and Levinson (1987), research in the realm of politeness has shown that certain lexical, grammatical, and prosodic phenomena

can only be fully explained from the perspective of sociological factors (such as face, territory, and power) and of pragmatic elements (such as the principle of cooperation and its maxims, the principle of politeness and its maxims, and the speech acts and their conditions of felicity).

Following this view, the elements of microlinguistic nature (modal forms, stance markers, discursive markers, non-agentive constructions, among others) act as strategies of (im)politeness that can mitigate, or intensify, the potential threats inherent to speech acts such as promises, criticisms, or warnings. (see KERBRAT-ORECCHIONI, 1992; EELEN, 2001; WATTS, 2005; CULPEPER, 1996; 2011; CUNHA, 2015).

The notion of face-work was introduced by Goffman as “the positive social value that a person effectively claims for himself by the line that others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (GOFFMAN, 1967, p. 223). In Goffman’s work, the term face-work is used to refer to the actions taken by interlocutors in an attempt to preserve their faces (defensive orientation), as well as the faces of others (protective orientation). More specifically, the notion of face-work refers to “the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face. Face-work serves to counteract “incidents” – that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face” (GOFFMAN, 1967, p. 12).

From the author’s perspective, face-work deals with the linguistic and non-linguistic actions performed by the interlocutors while claiming to maintain positive social values or self-image (face), “under the conditions considered satisfactory for the encounter” (HAUGH, 2013, p. 38).

Complementary to the notion face-work, the notion of territory refers both to the physical territory, to the “portion of space that surrounds an individual” (GOFFMAN, 1973, p.44), and to body parts, clothing, and personal objects. The territory also includes the reserved domains of the conversation, that is, the right of the individual to control who can address the speech, or the right of a group of people to “protect themselves from the intrusion and indiscretion of others” (GOFFMAN, 1973, p. 15).

In Brown and Levinson’s Theory of Politeness (1987, p. 61), Goffman’s notions of face and territory are reinterpreted in terms of positive face and negative face, respectively:

- (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition.
- (b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or ‘personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants.

That said, one can claim that the speech acts that threaten the negative face of the interactants include some degree of pressure to accept or reject a future act, which takes place, for example, in offers, promises, and recognition of gratitude. On the other hand, the acts threatening the positive face may include the speaker’s support (or lack of support) for the recipient’s self-image, which usually takes place in complaints, criticisms, accusations, or in conversation

about taboo topics.

In systematizing Goffman's approach to language studies, Brown and Levinson (1987) re-formulate the concept of face, giving it an approximate sense, while distinct from that originally proposed by Goffman. For Brown and Levinson (1987), the term face-work corresponds to the set of linguistic strategies that the speaker uses to avoid or to mitigate Face-Threatening Acts (FTA).

In the light of Brown and Levinson's work (1987), the notion of face-work experiences an important conceptual change. It may have become more restricted, since it only corresponds to the use of linguistic procedures (and not any procedures in general) that mitigate the threat of speech acts. However, the notion is broadened, since it goes on to encompass the strategies used to mitigate attacks on the negative face, and no longer only attacks on the positive face. It is on the basis of this notion of face-work that, more recently, Brown (2015, p. 326) conceptualizes politeness in these terms:

Politeness is essentially a matter of taking into account the feelings of others as to how they should be interactionally treated, including behaving in a manner that demonstrates appropriate concern for interactors' social status and their social relationship. Politeness – in this broad sense of speech oriented to an interactor's public persona or 'face' – is ubiquitous in language use.

## 2. NOMINALIZED TERMS AS HEDGES IN THE WRITTEN ACADEMIC DOMAIN

As a form of specialized written communication, academic writing has developed its own conventions. It is almost common sense that alleged objectivity and neutrality lie at the heart of academic mastery. Despite this inherent characteristic, several authors draw attention to the use of hedges (terms that express posture, or attitude) in academic writing (LAKOFF, 1973; HYLAND, 1998; MYERS, 1989). According to this view, scientific texts (in this study published papers) are not exclusively composed of specialized content. They also may display posture or stance to some extent.

With respect to a systemic-functional view of language, hedges highlight the potential that languages has as a means for people to “recognize the communicative function of the utterance, the type of offer, the declaration of command or the question, the attitudes and judgments embodied therein, as well as the rhetorical characteristics that constitute the speech as a symbolic act” (HALLIDAY; HASAN, 1989, p. 72). That is, the use of hedges can be conceived as one of the linguistic strategies through which speakers seek to protect their public images, as well as the public image of their interlocutors (MUSA, 2014).

In this work, we make the case that nominalizations can act as hedges, since they constitute an effective strategy used to mitigate the degree of commitment to a statement. In the literature on politeness, already pointed out in the earlier sections of this paper, instances of nominalization are conceived as strategies whereby the writer avoids limiting the freedom of action or choice of the reader. In this sense, nominalizations work as strategies related to negative politeness. This is what happens when, for instance, in a dialogue between employer and employee, the first

one says to the second: “The delivery of the report must be made early today.”

The illocutionary force of the statement is that of an order. For this reason, the employee has his negative face somewhat attacked, in that he is forced to comply with an order given by his boss. However, the instance of nominalization ‘delivery,’ allows for the omission of the agent of the delivery, as well as for its recipient. It thus functions as a resource for softening the attack on the negative face of the employee, or the invasion of his territory. The example also draws attention to the potential social distance between the interlocutors, as well as to the formality of the situation. Broadly speaking, this is how Brown and Levinson (1987) conceive the role of nominalizations as strategies of negative politeness.

Drawing from the framework we have described here, we regard nominalizations as a complex phenomenon, which is only fully observable when one considers them in different contexts, such as in the writing of academic papers. In this context, nominalizations, as we will attempt to showcase in the next section, seem to display a dual function, each of which is linked to the mitigation of attacks on the faces (positive and negative) of the reader and of the author.

Although in academic texts there are no such direct attacks to face as those occurring in orders to employees, for example, there is, however, a researcher requiring the reader to devote a certain amount of time to reading his work; furthermore, there is the alleged truth and pertinence of the research, alongside the theoretical framework on which he was based, the methodological steps he followed, and the results to which he came. From this perspective, the function of nominalizations may be that of making the nominalized processes (evaluation, construction, organization, selection, comparison, etc.) appear to the reader as happening without the interference (or agency) of a researcher. Within the use of nominalizations, the presence of a writer (the researcher) imposing the veracity of his actions on the reader is thus diminished.

The use of nominalizations in academic texts can also constitute a strategy that allows for the author to protect his/her positive and negative faces. By using a nominalization of whose verbal counterpart the author is the agent, he/she can omit the agent responsible for the action, which becomes unexpressed. The omission of the researcher in academic papers can be explained by a refusal to receive the merits of conducting the research. This owes to the fact that, in many societies, humility is a positive social value, which makes Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992; 2006) postulate that our social interactions may be governed by a law of modesty, which may be confirmed by all the taboo surrounding self-praise. It is also the value attributed to humility that made Leech (1983; 2014) include the

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<sup>1</sup> Leech (1983) conceives the Principle of Politeness as a constraint on human behavior that makes us, on the one hand, avoid discordance or communicative offense and, on the other, maintain or increase communicative courtesy or courtesy. As with the Gricean Principle of Cooperation, the Principle of Politeness is linked to maxims. Leech (1983, p. 132) proposes six maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. More recently, Leech (2014, p. 91) added four maxims to the previous ones: Obligation (by speaker), Obligation (by hearer), Opinion reticence and Feeling reticence.

maxim of modesty among the maxims of politeness.<sup>1</sup>

Following this principle, the author of an academic text, using nominalization, places the research work on the foreground, overshadowing the authorship. In this sense, by operating as a resource to claim a positive social value for the author himself (such as humility, self-denial, or generosity), nominalizations function as a strategy of positive politeness. It is worth mentioning, however, that the ‘anonymity’ of the researcher is not realistic, given the explicit authorship of the research work.

Nonetheless, the use of nominalizations may constitute, at the same time, a strategy with which the author tries to protect his negative face, as it allows for him not to ostensibly assume the possible weaknesses of the work or the problems that may have occurred during the development of the research. Excerpt (1), in which there are two occurrences of the nominalization ‘evaluation’, illustrates this notion:

- (1) A avaliação da mudança genética que ocorre nos rebanhos mostra-se importante para mensurar o grau de eficiência do processo de seleção usado, tanto com base em uma, ou, em várias características de interesse. Com a avaliação, é possível verificar se está em processo o melhoramento genético no rebanho, e se a taxa de ganho se apresenta satisfatória. (Trecho retirado da área de Ciências Biológicas I)

(The evaluation of genetic change that occurs in the herds is important to measure the efficiency of the selection process used, either based on one or several characteristics of interest. With the evaluation, it is possible to verify if the genetic improvement in the herd is in process, and if the rate of gain is satisfactory. (Excerpt taken from the area of Biological Sciences I)

Excerpt 1 draws attention to the importance of the ‘evaluation of genetic change’ carried out by the researchers, and reported in the paper. In this sense, the authors praise themselves for their own performance in the research, since they are the agents that evaluated the genetic change. Self-praising is a face threatening act (FTA), since, on the one hand, it threatens the positive face of the interlocutor (‘boasting about oneself is despising the other’). On the other hand, it also threatens the interlocutor’s negative face, once it imposes the need to accept the validity of the action accomplished, together with its respective assessment. Nonetheless, self-praise can also be accounted for as a FTA associated with the positive face of the author/speaker himself, who may be accused of being arrogant or presumptuous, or of violating the law of modesty. In the search for mitigating the offence to the faces involved in the interaction, in Excerpt 1, the researchers rely on the nominalization ‘evaluation’, in order to soften its offensive potential. By employing such a politeness strategy, the authors draw attention to the ‘evaluation process’ and to its importance, and not to the agent who performed it.

As one can see in Excerpt 1, the same linguistic resource, in this case a nominalization, can function as a complex strategy of politeness, acting to mitigate the attack not only on the positive and negative faces of the interlocutor, as anticipated by Brown and Levinson (1987), but also on the positive and negative faces of the author/speaker himself.

After we have described the theoretical background that serves as the backbone of this study, in the next section, we will describe the methods of data-

collection and the categories of analysis.

### 3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES FOR DATA GATHERING AND DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, we departed from the analysis of lexemes (lexical units) of Brazilian Portuguese. These units were collected in the form of instances of nominalization, by entering with the suffix -ÇÃO (-TION in English) in the corpus search tool. In order to do this, we identified the deverbals with this suffix in academic papers of CAPB (Corpus Acadêmico do Português Brasileiro – Corpus of Academic Brazilian Portuguese), which is a project in construction at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (Brazil). The corpus accounts for approximately 4.8 million words, distributed in 1,265 published papers from 48 disciplines within the scope of CAPES (Brazilian Governmental Research Agency), each area representing a subcorpus. Deverbals ending in -ÇÃO were our main choice for analysis here, owing to the fact that they were pervasive in the papers analyzed, as it is illustrated in Table 1 (further in this section). Moreover, according to Biber (2014), they are considered prominent representatives of nominalizations in academic writing.

To begin with, in order to analyze the data in a quantitative and qualitative fashion, we relied on the software Kitconc© (MOREIRA FILHO, 2008), and on its available tools. This software provides lists, organized according to word frequency, as well as concordance lines, allowing for the researcher to gain access to the broader context of each token. The software also calculates the dispersion of words in the corpus. This resource was fundamental for verifying whether the instances of nominalizations in focus had a similar distribution across different subcorpora.

After that, to determine the deverbals that would be analyzed, a list of the most frequent words of the corpus was elaborated, using Kitconc©. From this list, the 20 most frequent lexemes ending in -ÇÃO (-TION in English) were identified. Then, fifty occurrences of each of the most frequent lemmas found (“relation”, “organization”, “construction”, “evaluation” and “formation”) were randomly selected for analysis. A final confirmation of these items as deverbals was made, with the help of an online dictionary.<sup>2</sup> Table 1 shows the position of each deverbals analyzed in list of the most frequent words in the corpus:

TABLE 1 - Most frequent deverbals in CAPB

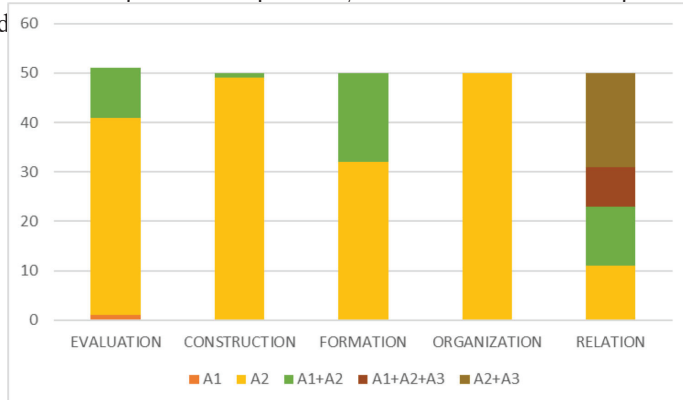
Rank	Deverbal nominalization		Tokens
	Portuguese	Translation	
46	RELAÇÃO	relation	7.299
138	AVALIAÇÃO	evaluation	2.855
175	FORMAÇÃO	formation	2.415
234	CONSTRUÇÃO	construction	1.928

<sup>2</sup> Portal da Língua Portuguesa. Available at: <<http://www.portaldalinguaportuguesa.org/>>.



364	ORGANIZAÇÃO	organization	1.392
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As for the distribution of overt arguments in the five most frequent instances of nominalizations in the corpus, Figure 1 illustrates our findings. In this figure, A1 refers to the subject of the input verb; A2 refers to the direct object of the input verb and



**FIGURE 1** – Distribution of the five most frequent instances of nominalization in the corpus and their overt arguments

As one can see, Figure 1 shows that A2, corresponding to the direct object of the input verb of the deverbals analyzed, represented the most frequently overt argument. This result may be associated with the tendency of objects to encode new and heavier information, being syntactically more complex, and therefore overtly expressed. Conversely, A1, corresponding to the subject of the input verb, tended to represent lighter, and less complex information, being thus covertly expressed (GIVÓN, 1983, CHAFE, 1994). Excerpt (2), taken from the corpus of this research, confirms such a tendency:

- (2) A fabricação de cimento responde por cerca de 2% do consumo global de energia e por cerca de 5% do consumo global industrial de energia, principalmente porque a reação  $\text{CaCO}_3 \text{ CaO} + \text{CO}_2$ , presente na formação de sua principal matéria-prima, o clínquer, é altamente endotérmica.

(Cement production accounts for about 2% of global energy consumption and about 5% of global industrial energy consumption, mainly because of the  $\text{CaCO}_3 \text{ CaO} + \text{CO}_2$  reaction, present in the formation of its main raw material, clinker, is highly endothermic.) (Excerpt taken from the area of Environmental Sciences.)

We also found that there was a tendency, in the papers analyzed, of A1 referring to the author of the text (the researcher). Excerpt (3) illustrates such a tendency:

- (3) A organização dos dados foi realizada pelo Software Microsoft Office Excel 2003(r) e

posteriormente foram exportados para a ferramenta computacional on-line SestatNet - Ambiente de Ensino e Aprendizagem de Estatística na web.

(The organization of the data was performed by Microsoft Office Excel 2003 (r) Software and later exported to the online computer tool SestatNet - Environment of Teaching and Learning of Statistics on the web.) (Excerpt taken from the area of Nursing)

In sum, the main procedures for data collection of this study were the following:

1. The most frequent instances of nominalizations in the corpus were identified, using corpus tools.
2. The verbal counterparts of the instances of nominalizations (A1, subject of the input verb, and A2/A3 objects of the input verb) were manually identified, as to find out whether the arguments were overly or covertly expressed.

After these steps were taken, a sample analysis of the 5 most frequent instances of nominalizations in the corpus was manually carried out to verify their connection with face-work and politeness strategies, as we attempt to describe in the following section.

#### 4. NOMINALIZATIONS IN SCIENTIFIC PAPERS: A SAMPLE ANALYSIS

The analysis of the corpus revealed that in none of the nominalizations analyzed (evaluation, construction, formation, organization and relation) did the author of the text become explicit, as the A1 (subject of the input verb). By the same token, the reader is not expressed as the A2 or A3 (usually direct and indirect objects) in any of the occurrences analyzed. Nonetheless, although the author is not expressed, in all occurrences of nominalizations in which A1 is the author, it can be inferred by means of anaphora, background knowledge and/or by recovering the text hypertheme. For example in (4):

- (4) Foram utilizadas 30 fêmeas não gestantes de preás para formação de cinco grupos experimentais contendo seis fêmeas cada.

(Thirty female non-pregnant females were used to form five experimental groups containing six females each.) (Excerpt taken from the area of Zoology.)

In this Excerpt, the agent of the process of 'forming five groups of animals' are the researchers, who, though implicit in the sentence in which the nominalization occurs, can be inferred through background knowledge and by recovering the text hypertheme. The same kind of recovery takes place in Excerpt (5).

- (5) Para o processo de organização dos dados se utilizou três figuras metodológicas do Discurso do Sujeito Coletivo (DSC): Expressão-chave (ECH), ou seja, trechos que revelam a essência do conteúdo dos depoimentos individuais, fundamentais para a construção do DSC.

(For the data organization process, three methodological figures of the Collective Subject Discourse (DSC) were used: Key expression (ECH), that is, excerpts that

reveal the essence of the content of the individual statements, fundamental for the construction of the DSC.) (Excerpt taken from the area of Nursing.)

The agents in charge of organizing the data are the researchers, who are not mentioned in the text, when the ‘process of organizing’ is nominalized. These agents, however, can be inferred through background knowledge, since those who usually organize the data of studies are researchers.

The following excerpt illustrates well how academic texts display a concern with concealing the author, particularly when he/she corresponds to the A1 (subject of the input verb) of the nominalization:

- (6) A densidade da rede foi calculada a partir das relações identificadas pelos onze participantes como sendo aquelas que suas empresas mantêm com os demais participantes da rede. Essa densidade indica o potencial de interconexão entre os atores da rede e representa a relação entre os elos existentes e os possíveis.

(The network density was calculated from the relationships identified by the eleven participants as being those that their companies maintain with the other participants of the network. This density indicates the potential for interconnection among network actors and represents the relationship between existing and possible links.) (Excerpt taken from the area of Engineering I)

In Excerpt (6), there are two occurrences of the deverbal ‘relation’, the first one is in the plural and the second one is in the singular. In the first occurrence, A1 (subject of the input verb) refers to ‘the eleven participants of the research’. This can be inferred from the passage: ‘from the relationships identified by the eleven participants’. Nonetheless, in the second occurrence, A1 (subject of the input verb) is the author of the study, as one can apprehend from the following passage: ‘This density (...) represents the relationship between existing and possible links’. The agent possibly responsible for establishing the relationship in focus is the author of the text, however, this is not encoded in the passage.

We also identified occurrences of nominalizations in which the A1 refers to the author of another study and not to the author who employs the nominalization in the text, as in this Excerpt:

- (7) O estudo clínico de Cohn et al.,<sup>23</sup> que avaliou a relação entre o consumo desse mineral com a pressão sanguínea em idosos, constatou a associação de que, para cada 1 g/dia de potássio acima do preconizado, tem-se a diminuição de 0,9 mmHg da pressão arterial sistólica e 0,8 mmHg da pressão arterial diastólica.

(The clinical study by Cohn et al., 23 which evaluated the relationship between the consumption of this mineral and blood pressure in the elderly, found the association that, for every 1 g/day of potassium above that recommended, there is a decrease in 0.9 mmHg of systolic artery pressure and 0.8 mmHg of diastolic blood pressure.) (Excerpt taken from the area of Medicine I)

In Excerpt (7), we can infer that the A1 of the nominalized term ‘relationship’ is ‘Cohn et al’. In any case, even though the authors are mentioned, agentivity is metaphorically attributed to the clinical study, and not to those responsible for it, since A1 (subject of the input verb) is ‘a clinical study’ and not ‘Cohn et al’

themselves: ‘The clinical study of Cohn et al. A1, 23 who evaluated the relationship (...), found the association’. The omission of the core A1 (subject) is a strategy that, alongside with the nominalization present in the following subordinate sentence, is used to weaken the authors’ accountability for their findings, even when they refer to their colleagues, and not to themselves.

In many cases, it is difficult to pinpoint whether the A1 of an instance of nominalization is the author or a third-party, considering only the sentence in which the nominalization occurs. However, in all these cases, the linguistic context helps us clarify which argument is in focus, as in Excerpt (8):

- (8) A rede comercial foi representada pela troca de informações de conteúdo comercial, como a avaliação de fornecedores comuns (...). Esses entrevistados também foram responsáveis por fornecer duas informações.

(The commercial network was represented by the exchange of commercial content information, such as the evaluation of common suppliers (...). These respondents were also responsible for providing two pieces of information.) (Excerpt taken from the area of Engineering II)

In this excerpt, the agent of the ‘evaluation’ process is not expressed in the sentence in which the nominalization takes place. If we only consider this sentence, it is possible to infer that the one who evaluates the common suppliers is the author of the study: ‘the evaluation of common suppliers carried out by the researchers’. However, the following statement shows that those interviewed were the ones responsible for the evaluation. This interpretation is also supported by the presence of the connector, ‘also’:

‘These respondents also’, which indicates that the respondents not only evaluated the suppliers, but also provided an evaluation of the service.

In the following section, we will proceed with some final remarks concerning our findings in this study. We will make an attempt to show how nominalizations can render a complex linguistic phenomenon, owing to the fact that they intertwine the negative and the positive face of both reader and writer in the academic domain.

## FINAL REMARKS

In the study of instances of nominalizations proposed here, it was possible to observe that they represented strategies of non-agentiveness, used to omit the author of the papers, while they emphasized the research. From a pragmatic viewpoint, this strategy was implemented to lessen the possibility of the author being viewed as arrogant, or excessively self-assured. Moreover, the instances of nominalizations with A1 omission worked, mostly, to soften the potential aggressiveness that an explicit act of self-praise would offer for the positive face of the researcher.

As a consequence, in the academic papers analyzed here, nominalizations operated, to a large degree, as a strategy to mitigate the potential attacks on the

positive face of the author himself, acting, therefore, as a strategy of positive politeness.

Following this view, the instances of nominalizations also worked as hedges, in that they were employed as a discursive strategy for the expression of posture, or stance, associated with the preservation of the researcher public image.

Consequently, within the use of nominalizations, the presence of the author (the researcher) was diminished. As a result, the instances of nominalizations worked as a resource to avoid the imposition of the veracity of the paper's content on the reader, therefore operating as a strategy of negative politeness.

In conclusion, the findings of this study confirm our initial hypothesis: the use of instances of nominalizations is a complex discursive phenomenon. This complexity is inherent to the academic domain, and it is also best perceived when face-work and politeness strategies are taken as a powerful resource for public image projection.

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