

Representing agents of human rights violations: discourse analysis of social media during the 2019 Chilean social protests

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In contexts of human rights (HR) violations, the attribution of responsibility is a recurrent topic of interest. In discourse analysis, this issue has been studied among others through the lens of agentivity (e.g. De Cock and Michaud Maturana, 2014). However, few analyses have focused on social media communication. The aim of this presentation is to explore how agents of HR violations are referred to on Twitter/X during the 2019 Chilean social protests. More specifically, it analyses who is represented as agents of (and therefore responsible for) HR violations and how they are identified, in other words, which characteristics are assigned to them. A comparative analysis with how patients of HR violations are represented is also included. Indeed, agentivity varies according to a combination of syntactic, semantic and discursive parameters, the presence of an explicit reference to the agents being one of them. When the agents are explicit, they can be represented in different ways, which affects the representation of their responsibility. For this analysis, we mainly draw on Van Leeuwen's (1996) categories for analysing the representation of social actors. Our data was collected on Twitter/X via popular hashtags used to denounce the state violence at the time of the 2019 Chilean social protests (e.g. *#ChileViolaDDHH* and *#EnChileNosDejanCiegos*). Based on previous work, the analysis starts with the following hypotheses. On the one hand, given the nature of the corpus, we expect to find a variety of actors represented as agents of HR violations, including for instance politician leaders who did not participate directly in the repression (De Cock and Pécher, 2025). On the other hand, variation between the representation of the perpetrators and that of the victims is expected, with a general tendency to give more specific information about the latter (De Cock and Michaud Maturana, 2014).

References:

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