04

Verbal violence – a first approximation based on Latin American migrants' experiences in German institutions

04

Verbal violence – a first approximation based on Latin American migrants' experiences in German institutions

Silke Jansen & Lucía Romero Gibu

1. Introduction

A woman gets injured from a fall at the train station and is urged later to sign a hospital release written in a language she does not understand. She is not allowed to contact her relative, who must stay in the waiting room. A man is requested by a police officer to take off his jacket in winter and to answer questions in the street while freezing, with the only justification that he looks "suspicious". A student is threatened by the secretary of a university department that she would tear up her contract, because the mistake she made is "not acceptable in the country where she lives now". These scenes, which were reported by Latin Americans who reside in Germany, illustrate a facet of a migrant's daily experience that has rarely been studied by linguists: problematic communication events that arise in situations of unequal distribution of power, through the attribution of negative features to someone whose otherness is constructed and highlighted unidirectionally during the encounter.

Although the migrants clearly perceive the communicative behavior of their interlocutors as harming (and, hence, as a form of violence or aggression), its non-physical character and linguistic implicitness increase its potential to be tolerated by the participants or bystanders.

These three examples are part of a corpus of critical communication incidents,[1] composed through semi-structured interviews within the project "Violence in Institutions (VIOLIN): an integrated linguistic, politological and psychological approach to the experiences and mental health of refugees and migrants", which started in May 2019 at Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nürnberg. VIOLIN seeks to focus attention on hidden forms of violence against migrants that may affect their wellbeing and health but are particularly difficult to detect, document and study – given that they are not carried out by physical force but through language, and usually behind the walls of public institutions. Designed as an interdisciplinary project, VIOLIN aims at (a) documenting migrants' experiences of verbal interactions with representatives of German institutions, (b) understanding how violence emerges from overt and covert linguistic strategies, (c) determining typical settings of verbal violence and its prevalence within different kinds of institutions and migrant groups, (d) studying the biological responses of people facing acts of verbal violence, and (e) identifying possible health risks related to a constant exposure to these kinds of stressful situations. The ultimate goal is to help enhance the quality of communication in institutions by developing recommendations that are empirically grounded and practicable according to intercultural competence criteria.

[1] For a detailed description of the corpus see section 3.1.

Although the interplay between language and violence in the context of migration has generated an increasing amount of interest among researchers, most papers in Linguistics have focused on analyzing hate speech or polemical debates in online and print media from a (Critical) Discourse Analysis perspective (e.g. Musolff 2015; Rheindorf & Wodak 2018). Manifestations of violence in direct or mediated interactions between representatives of institutions and migrants have been less studied so far. The present contribution offers some theoretical and methodological considerations regarding verbal violence, and makes a first attempt at applying them to the linguistic data gathered within VIOLIN. Section 2 discusses some theoretical aspects of violence, language and communication within institutions. In section 3, we present the methodological framework used within VIOLIN for collecting and analyzing data. In section 4, we propose a detailed analysis of an incident reported by one of our informants. In section 5, we provide some conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework: Verbal violence, speech act theory, and institutional communication

2.1. Verbal violence

Although the most visible form of violence is that inflicted by physical force, researchers have pointed out that the concept of violence should not be restricted to physical aggression alone but should include any kind of behavior against individuals or groups that has negative consequences for the target's physical and mental integrity and health (cf. Iadicola &

Shupe 2013; Barak 2003: esp. 26). According to the nature of the entity from which it originates, *individual* or *interpersonal*, *institutional* as well as *structural* forms of violence can be distinguished (cf. Iadicola & Shupe 2013; Barak 2003). In the present contribution we focus on language as an instrument of violence in face-to-face interactions, prioritizing the individual and interpersonal dimension of the phenomenon.[2]

In analogy to other forms of violence, verbal violence can be understood as linguistic behavior that has detrimental effects on the interlocutor. However, the damage caused by words is not primarily physical (although psychobiological reactions can actually be triggered by verbal behavior), but rather affects the concerned person's positive self-identity. Following Goffman, we refer to the public self-identity of individuals as *face*, defined as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact", that is "an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (Goffman 1967: 5). Normally, participants in an interaction cooperatively engage in "face-work" (Goffman 1967: 12–13), showing consideration of the feelings and desires of their interlocutors. Against this backdrop, verbal aggression is the intentional use of linguistic strategies to damage the interlocutor's face wants, with the aim of causing psychological harm (cf. the concept of the symbolic-social body as the target of verbal violence in Krämer 2007). In this respect, there is a certain degree of overlap between verbal aggression or violence and linguistic impoliteness, defined by Culpeper as the communication (by the speaker) or the perception (by the hearer) of an intentional face-attack (2005: 38; cf. also Bonacchi 2017: 20–21). However, we are reluctant to consider cases such as those mentioned in the introduction as "mere" impoliteness, given the power divide between the interlocutors and the relatively serious consequences. Especially in contexts of migration, verbal violence seems to be directly related to the construction of in- and outgroups, the negotiation and affirmation of positions of power, as well as negative stereotyping and denigration of individuals or social groups (Herrmann & Kuch 2007: 24; Bonacchi 2017: 19) – social processes that have been analyzed under the notion of *discrimination*. The exclusion of discriminated individuals has even been characterized as a canonical manifestation of violence (Krämer 2007: 43–44).

In line with these observations and summarizing previous research, Bonacchi (2017: 15–16) states that recurrent components of verbal violence and aggression include expressing negative feelings and attitudes toward the other interlocutor (for example, insulting him or her) and exercising power and control over the other interlocutor, by reducing his or her interactional scope. Obviously, these practices are inherently face-damaging.

However, it's often difficult to decide whether a verbal attack has taken place or not. The aggressive potential of an utterance can be concealed behind a neutral or even a supportive surface structure, or vice versa (e.g. in the case of "mock impoliteness", sarcasm and irony, or when aggressive speech acts such as threats or insults are disguised as simple descriptions or observations, cf. Bonacchi 2017: 19). Therefore, both the speaker's and the hearer's perspective, as well as the communicative

[2] One should, however, be aware of the fact that interpersonal violence is often supported by surrounding institutional and structural conditions.

setting (in the broadest sense), must be considered in order to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Speech Act Theory (SAT) provides a useful way to theorize about the potentially violent force of language and its real-world effects.

2.2. Speech acts

Different methodological approaches have highlighted the performative character of violence exercised upon people through words (Bonacchi 2017; Herrmann & Kuch 2007: 9, 11): using language, speakers do not only describe, but actually perform actions, so that an utterance can be an act of violence in itself. Speech Act Theory provides a useful framework not only for understanding the performative dimension of linguistic behavior, but also the changing and ambiguous functions of utterances in social life.

According to Searle (Searle 2012: 22–25; cf. Austin 1962: 98–99), speech acts can be analyzed on four different levels. At a basic level, speakers produce acceptable sentences according to the norms of their language, relying on their linguistic knowledge. In other words, an **utterance** is made in line with the boundaries of grammaticality and the options available in the lexicon. At a second level, this utterance is a **propositional act** insofar as it is related to something "in the world", for example through reference or predication. At a third level, the utterance can be interpreted as an intentional verbal action, also called **illocutionary act**, according to the communicative conventions of the speech community. Finally, the utterance constitutes a **perlocutionary act** in that it causes certain effects on the listener, may they be intended or not. In summary, when someone says something, different acts are being performed at the same time. The propositional, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary acts are neither totally independent from each other, nor do they emerge from one another in a mechanistic way.

In addition, various illocutionary acts may be performed with the same utterance, so that participants must rely on different kinds of contextualization cues in order to infer the communicative function of an utterance. In relation to *indirect speech acts*, Searle (Searle 1975: 168) states that "a sentence that contains the illocutionary force indicators for one kind of illocutionary act can be uttered to perform, *in addition*, another type of illocutionary act".

For example, the propositional content of the sentence in Spanish "Ella no es de Bayern" 'She doesn't come from Bayern[3]' ascribes an attribute (to be born outside Bavaria) to a female person. On the surface level, the illocutionary act carried out is that of informing. However, the informant who relayed the situation from which the sentence was taken interpreted it as an indirect speech act with an aggressive illocutionary force. She reported that the doctor who treated her after an accident said it to another member of the medical staff, in a harsh tone, and after complaining about her incapacity to speak German properly. Against this backdrop, she inferred that the doctor's intention was not only to inform his colleague about the patient's origin, but also to commit an act of exclusion which she experienced as aggressive.

[3] *Bayern* is the German name of the State of Bavaria (Spanish *Baviera*). The German name is maintained here although the sentence is uttered in Spanish. In order to reproduce what her German counterpart said, the interviewee reconstructed the expression through this mixed construction.

In the interview, she describes the perlocutionary effects of this speech act as emotional distress, which had negative consequences for the further development of the experience because she was unable to find appropriate assistance and signed her own discharge although she was still injured.

In this case, like in many others from our corpus, an aggressive illocutionary force is not directly manifested on the surface level, and the alleged "aggressor" could easily disclaim any harmful intentions (Bonacchi 2017: 25). Whether or not the damage was intended, the informant clearly experiences the utterance as violence. Several authors have pointed out that that perception seems to be the crucial element in the identification of violence (Herrmann & Kuch 2007: 25; Krämer 2007: 34–35). In this line of thinking, Havryliv (2017: 43) makes a distinction between **verbal aggression** and **verbal violence**. A speech act can be called aggressive when the speaker has the intention to harm the interlocutor and selects linguistic strategies in order to achieve this goal. Verbal violence occurs when a speech act causes negative effects on the wellbeing of the addressee, independent of whether the utterer was aware of the damaging potential of the act or not. Thus, verbal aggression is defined in accordance with the intended illocutionary force of a verbal attack, while verbal violence depends on the actual perlocutionary effect. Under the migrant-centered perspective adopted in the VIOLIN project, we focus on interactions that informants report to have affected them in a negative way, and therefore fall under the category of verbal violence. Verbal aggression may or may not be involved, and in most cases of perceived violence without overtly marked aggression it is impossible to verify whether or not the speaker actually intended to hurt his or her interlocutor. However, by collecting and analyzing critical incidents reported by migrants, we aim at detecting features of verbal interactions in institutional contexts to which they systematically attribute a harmful effect, and to identify the typical illocutionary forces that the interviewees assign to the utterances of their counterparts in problematic encounters, as well as the perlocutionary effects most commonly described.

For the time being, we assume that covert verbal violence emerges from a complex interplay between the linguistic structure of the utterance, the interlocutors' expectations and implicit knowledge regarding the interaction, and different extra-linguistic factors that guide the interpretation of the situation. Among these are the typical characteristics of institutional communication, which will be presented in the following section.

2.3. Institutional communication

The violent potential of utterances doesn't emerge from linguistic choices alone. When attributing (aggressive or other) illocutions to utterances, speakers rely on cotext, context and background knowledge in a complex way and they evaluate their interlocutor's verbal behavior against their communicative expectations from previous experience (Bonacchi 2017: 18; compare also Grice's 1975 cooperation principle and conversational maxims). Thus, the same speech act may be interpreted differently and cause different perlocutionary effects, depending on extra-linguistic factors. The particular conditions of communication within institutions thus cannot be neglected when it comes to examining how verbal violence arises

in interaction between migrants and institutional agents. **Formalized interaction scripts** (cf. Becker-Mrotzek 2001: 1513) and different kinds of **asymmetries between participants** (Drew & Heritage 1992: 47–53; Hee 2012: 19-21, Rosenberg 2014: 41–43) have been highlighted as core characteristics of institutional communication.

Interactions in institutions generally have a precise purpose, which is embedded in a broader institutional, administrative or societal matrix. Roles of participants are fixed, and the development of the conversation follows a formalized interactional script in order to guarantee efficiency in communication (Hee 2012: 21; Rosenberg 2014: 38–39). For example, many institutional scripts contain a data interrogation sequence, where the representative asks a given number of questions about personal information in a given order, and the client is expected to answer them (Hee 2012: 36; Rosenberg 2014: 205). Thus, topic development, turn-taking behavior, speech act types and other characteristics of the interaction are largely predetermined. Awareness of the interactional script related to a particular procedure is part of the background knowledge that guides the interlocutors' behavior and mutual interpretations. Deviations from interactional expectations may serve as contextualization cues, for example to infer illocutions that are not overtly expressed.

When engaging in an institutional interaction, representatives and clients endorse different but complementary roles, characterized by different kinds of asymmetries:

> […] institutional interactions may be characterized by role-structured, institutionalized, and omnirelevant asymmetries between participants in terms of such matters as differential distribution of knowledge, rights to knowledge, access to conversational resources, and to participation in the interaction. In ordinary conversation between friends or acquaintances, by contrast, this is not normally the case. (Drew & Heritage 1992: 49; cf. also Hee 2012: 21; Rosenberg 2014: 41)

Differences in knowledge may relate to information about institutional structures, procedures and routines, but also to cultural background and linguistic resources (ibid.; Ehlich & Rehbein 1994: 320; Hee 2012: 29). Given that institutional interactions with migrants are generally also intercultural encounters, misunderstandings and conflicts may arise from asymmetrical language resources and divergent expectations for communicative behavior, and from false assumptions about the body of knowledge shared by the interlocutors (Rosenberg 2014: 244ff).

In contrast to other contexts where speakers are free to engage in a conversation or to break it off, institutional communication is compulsory by nature (cf. "zwangskommunikativer Charakter" according to Hinnenkamp 1985: 283–284, see also Hee 2012: 20, 31), and refusal to cooperate may trigger sanctions. The formalized nature of institutional interaction scripts reduces the array of possibilities for action available to participants, with different degrees according to different types of institutions (cf. Ehlich & Rehbein 1994: 317–318). This is not to say, however, that the clients' role in institutional interactions is only passive. Indeed, clients may challenge institutional hierarchies and asymmetries and show provocative or even aggressive verbal behavior (cf. Rosenberg 2014: esp. 252-253; Porila 2015: 221).

That being said, the reduction of interactional scope mentioned by Bonacchi (2017: 15–17) as one of the core components of (verbal) violence appears thus to a certain degree as an inherent feature of institutional communication. Indeed, power asymmetries between interlocutors have been reported to play a key role in the emergence of verbal violence (Krämer 2007: 42–43). However, it should be made clear that the compulsory character of institutional communication and the clients' reduced possibilities for verbal action cannot, per se, be considered as verbal violence. Rather, they are a manifestation of the regulating function of institutional power in the interactional field. For the purpose of VIOLIN, we propose to restrict the concept of *verbal violence* to the interpersonal level – that means, to verbal exchanges between individuals that are experienced as harmful for the positive self-concept or *face* of at least one of the participants. In our project, we make a first attempt at empirically documenting cases of perceived interpersonal violence between migrants and representatives of German institutions with the Critical Incident Technique, which will be presented in the next section along with methodological issues.

3. Methodological framework

3.1. Empirical approaches to verbal violence against migrants: the Critical Incident Technique

The collection of empirical data about interactions with a violent component in institutions leads to a number of methodological difficulties. First, considerations of data protection and a certain discomfort about giving researchers access into internal processes might lead to reluctancy among institutions and their representatives to allow recordings (compare also Porila 2015: 25-26). Secondly, verbal violence functions in such a way that even the affected people usually have doubts about whether what they experienced was *really* an act of aggression or violence.

As a first approximation to the phenomenon, we collect narratives of "unpleasant" interactions among migrants from Latin America living in Germany with the **Critical Incident Technique** (CIT). CIT was developed in the context of the Aviation Psychology Program of the United States Army Air Forces in World War II. At that time, critical incidents with positive and negative outcomes in aviation were collected and analyzed in order to determine which abilities were required to be a good pilot (cf. Flanagan 1954). Since then, CIT has been extensively used in social and communicative sciences (especially intercultural communication) as an ex-post procedure to gather data on events (Butterfield et al. 2005) where people showed some kind of behavior which led to positive or negative outcomes, whose appearance is unpredictable and which have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences. Within the VIOLIN project, we collect reports on negative experiences in verbal interactions with representatives of German institutions, using a narrative stimulus and a semi-structured guideline (VIOLIN_CIT).

Our corpus, which is not yet completed, currently consists of 49 individual interviews in Spanish language, obtained with VIOLIN_CIT. As of April 2020, 32 of them have been transcribed with ELAN (version 5.5), organized with Arbil (version 2.6-1109) using CLARIN resources, and partially coded with MaxQDA (version 2018). The participants are

citizens from Latin American countries who reside in Germany and speak Spanish as their first language. The interviews were conducted by students from the Master programs "The Americas / Las Américas" and "Linguistics" at FAU, who were native or highly proficient speakers of Spanish, and had some familiarity with the topic of our study for biographical and / or academic reasons. The interviews were conducted individually, and the interviewers took great care to create an atmosphere of confidence and relaxed openness so that participants felt comfortable to narrate their experiences.

In the specialized literature on communication between migrants and representatives of institutions of the receiving society, "authentic" data, i.e. recordings of direct interactions, are usually considered to be the most valuable empirical basis (cf. Rosenberg 2014: 60). Sometimes, recordings are also triangulated with interviews or questionnaires with both parties in order to enhance the objectivity of the data (ibid.). However, this approach was infeasible for the present study, as institutions are not likely to open their doors to researchers documenting verbal violence against migrants. In contrast to the studies mentioned before, the material gathered within VIOLIN with the CIT consists of narratives of personal experience that are highly subjective re-creations of past events, rather than objective representations of them. The open-ended character of our interviews, together with the spatial and temporal distance between the interview situation and the recounted incident, contributes further to the subjective character of the material. However, under the migrant-centered framework proposed here, this subjectivity is not only tolerated, but intended: If – as we explained before – verbal violence emerges from the speaker's reaction to his or her interlocutor's behavior, based on subjective interpretation, then a first analytical approximation to the phenomenon should start from the affected person's perception. As we have shown in section 2, verbal violence, especially in its covert manifestation, cannot be directly observed in interactions, but must *always* be inferred by the analyst from linguistic and other behavior. In contrast to recordings, the narratives produced by migrants provide firsthand information on attributed illocutions and on perlocutionary effects, as well as on components of cotext, context and background knowledge that led to those interpretations and emotional reactions. Through the narrative construction, those pieces of information are integrated by the informants into an organized whole of experience.[4] Collecting them allows us to examine how perceived verbal violence emerges from making sense of a complex interplay of linguistic and contextual phenomena that guide the interpretation of verbal interactions. It also makes it easier to avoid the common pitfall of SAT which often confines the analysis to isolated speech acts with minimal context. Finally, further information frequently offered in the interviews (e.g. regarding migration biographies, typical challenges within the adaptation process and migrants' reactions to them, comparisons between the homeland and Germany, values and attitudes at their arrival and at present, etc.) helps to reconstruct how the informants position themselves towards or within the re-

[4] Compare Bergmann & Luckmann's (1995:293-295) considerations about the reconstructive character of communicative genres, including the narrative genres, as well as Atkinson & Delamont's sharp remarks (2006:166) on the necessity to analyze narratives and testimonials from a critical perspective, given that they are *social* phenomena.

ceiving society and construct their "face" as migrants in Germany. In sum, narratives on critical incidents provided by migrants are neither more nor less "authentic" than recordings would be – they are just one way of capturing migrants' experience in Germany among other possible approaches. For the specific demands of our study, they provide an added value because they allow access to the involved person's perceptions and constructions of the incident, and thus to information that otherwise could only be inferred by the researcher, from his or her point of view. In addition, common obstacles related to fieldwork in institutions can be avoided. In order to appropriately analyze autobiographical accounts, a narrative approach is needed. This approach will be outlined in the following section.

3.2. Analyzing accounts of Critical Incidents as narratives

As Labov & Waletzky state in a seminal text, narrative as "one verbal technique for recapitulating experience" (1967: 13) serves two fundamental functions, which they refer to as *referential* and *evaluative* (ibid.). In line with this distinction, referential and evaluative components can be identified within a narrative. Referential components present the facts or events important to the development of the narrated incident, answering the question "What happened?". Those facts are presented in a particular chronological order that cannot be reversed without changing the overall temporal interpretation. In evaluative segments, speakers give additional information on the implications and consequences of single facts or of the event as a whole for their personal needs, desires and perceptions, answering the question "So what?" (cf. Labov 1997). Although priority should be given to semantical considerations (cf. De Fina 2012: 32), referential and evaluative stretches of the narrative can be distinguished, at least to a certain extent, on structural grounds. For example, subordination or irrealis mood (in narratives produced in English language) can be interpreted as indications that a clause is evaluative (cf. Labov & Waletzky 1967: 12–17; Labov 1997 for further details). By grammatically distinguishing between events that are temporally bounded or unbounded in the past, Romance languages have an additional structural device for distinguishing between facts that belong to a chain of events, and descriptions of concomitant circumstances. In line with different approaches within Romance Linguistics that focus on the functioning of aspectual distinctions in discourse,[5] we assume that referential information belonging to the chain of events tends to be coded in verbal forms that present events as temporally bounded (basically, Spanish *pretérito perfecto simple*), and evaluative information in verbal forms that present events as temporally unbounded (basically, Spanish *imperfecto*, but also present tense).

As for the overall structural organization, narratives generally begin with an orientation, providing information on time, place, participants and other circumstances of the event. This is followed by the description of the complicating action, with its complications and resolutions. Finally, narratives often end with

[5] Compare especially Weinrich's (1964) canonical model of tense and his notion of *tense relief*, according to which the *pretérito perfecto simple* codes information as the foreground of a narrative, while the *imperfecto* signals that the information belongs to its background.

a coda, a statement that captures in a nutshell the point of the whole narrative and connects it to the present moment (Labov & Waletzky 1967: 39; Labov 1997).

The copresence and interaction of referential and evaluative components makes personal narratives a particularly promising text genre for the analysis of verbal violence. Given that our interviews focus on communicative experiences, many narratives are centered around what different participants said or asked at certain points of the event. Thus, the referential part of the narrative is often a description of an interactional sequence with its surrounding circumstances. In the evaluative clauses and sections, however, informants explain how they interpret their interlocutor's verbal and nonverbal behavior, and express their feelings and emotional reactions to it. The key to reconstructing what triggered the informants' perception of verbal violence lies in the mutual references and dependencies between referential and evaluative statements in the narratives.

In the following case study of one exemplary critical incident from our corpus, we make a first attempt at combining SAT with Labov & Waletzky's model for narrative analysis, in order to gain insights into the emergence of verbal violence in institutional contexts.

4. Sample analysis: Police control at the train

In the following, we offer a verbal transcription of a critical incident reported by a participant from Central America. We reproduce the original version in Spanish with its translation to English:[6]

	Spanish (original)	**English (translation)**
01	ehm, bueno, digamos, un incidente muy feo, eh	ehm, well, let's say, a very awful incident was, eh
02	un control de seguridad que tuve en un tren, ehm	a security control that I had in a train, ehm
03	yo iba de camino a Suiza para una ent revista de trabajo, ehm	I was on my way to Switzerland for a job interview, ehm
04	digamos que de todas las personas que estaban en el vagón, eh	let's say that of all the people in the train car, eh
05	yo no era el único extranjero	I wasn't the only foreigner
06	pero sí era el único extranjero con piel morena, ¿verdad?	but I was the only foreigner with dark skin, you know?

[6] The following text is an orthographical adaptation of the transcription of the incident. Paraverbal and prosodic elements were omitted.

07	o sea, pues, sí lo recuerdo muy bien, había	I mean, I do remember that very well, there were
08	no sé si eran chinos japoneses o coreanos	I don't know if they were Chinese Japanese or Korean
09	pero había gente, digamos, asiática	but there were, let's say, Asian people
10	y, ehm, acababa de suceder la crisis migratoria, ¿verdad?, ehm	and, ehm, the migratory crisis had just occurred, you know? Ehm
11	y obviamente era normal que hubiese más controles, ¿verdad?	and obviously it was normal that there were more controls, you know?
12	lo que me sorprendió a mí fue que primero	what surprised me was that first
13	el tren iba en dirección a Suiza	the train was going to Switzerland
14	y no de Suiza a Alemania	and not from Switzerland to Germany
15	que es donde más controlaban al lado de	where there were the greatest number of controls
16	o de Italia hacia Suiza	or from Italy to Switzerland
17	pero el viaje era de Alemania a Suiza	but the trip was from Germany to Switzerland
18	entonces ya, digamos, me quedé un poco confundido	so, let's say, I was a little confused
19	por qué en esa dirección había controles	why there were controls in this direction
20	segundo, eh, fue una cosa bastante descarada por parte de los oficiales porque	second, eh, this was a very blatant thing on the part of the officers because
21	mm*	mm

22	yo no, yo estaba sentado, estaba leyendo un libro	I wasn't, I was sitting, reading a book
23	no estaba haciendo nada que me hiciese parecer sospechoso	I wasn't doing anything that could have made me look suspicious
24	o algo que alguien	or anything that anybody
25	que incomodara a alguien	that could have disturbed anybody
26	ehm y llegaron tres policías	ehm and three police officers arrived
27	se pararon frente a mí	they stood in front of me
28	me empezaron a cuestionar que	and began to ask
29	qué estaba haciendo en el tren	what I was doing in this train
30	para dónde iba	where I was going
31	que por qué iba para Suiza	why I was going to Switzerland
32	que por qué quería trabajar en Suiza	why I wanted to work in Switzerland
33	y eso que no eran gente, no eran agentes de la policia suiza	and all that even though they weren't officers from the Swiss Police
34	sino de la policía alemana, ¿verdad?	but from the German Police, you know?
35	entonces, digamos, eh, no sé, ¿sabes?	so, let's say, eh, I don't know, you know?
36	como que no entendía	like I didn't understand
37	por qué tanto interés de qué iba a hacer en Suiza, o sea	why there was so much interest in what I was going to do in Switzerland, I mean
38	mira, ya, es como bueno, se va de Alemania, bueno adiós, ¿no?, ehm	look, it's just like, well, he is leaving Germany, well, okay bye, isn't? Ehm

39	pero me di cuenta de que realmente el control no era ni rutinario	but I realized that this really wasn't a routine check
40	porque tampoco es que hayan sido como muy, eh, juiciosos	because it wasn't either so like if they were very, eh, thoughtful
41	a la hora de controlar documentos	when checking documents
42	porque por lo general cuando te piden el documento de identidad	because in general when they ask you for your identification document
43	llaman incluso a una agencia central	they even call a central department
44	donde piden la corroboración de los datos y demás	where they ask for the corroboration of the personal info and so on
45	ellos me pidieron a mí mi documento de identificación	they just asked me to show my identification document
46	ehm, sólo lo vieron	ehm, they just looked at it
47	me preguntaron qué estaba haciendo en el tren	they asked me what I was doing in the train
48	para dónde iba, que qué hacía en Alemania	where I was going, what I was doing in Germany
49	y les expliqué que estaba estudiando	and I explained to them that I was studying
50	y que iba a hacer una entrevista de trabajo para una práctica	and that I was going to a job interview for an internship
51	para hacer mi tesis del bachelor	to do my bachelor thesis
52	y, eh, me preguntaron que qué es lo que yo tenía dentro de mi maletín	and, eh, they asked me what I had inside my bag
53	que iba, digamos, en el portamaletines arriba de los asientos, ehm	that, let's say, was in the luggage rack above the seats, ehm

54	y les dije que únicamente llevaba la ropa que me iba a poner, ¿verdad?	and I said that I was only carrying the clothes I was going to wear, you know?
55	porque prácticamente no iba nada más ahí	because there was practically nothing else in there
56	y la pregunta me la hicieron, eh, dos o tres veces	and they asked me this question, eh, like two or three times
57	hasta que les dije: "¿Saben qué? ¿Quieren que les abra el maletín?"	until I said: "You know what? Do you want me to open the suitcase for you?"
58	y ya se dieron cuenta que me empecé a molestar	and then they noticed that I was beginning to get upset
59	porque me di cuenta que el control no era rutinario, ¿verdad?	because I realized that this wasn't a routine control, you know?
60	sino era simplemente porque yo era extranjero, ¿verdad?	but that it was happening to me just because I was a foreigner, you know?
61	ehm, digamos, es un poco una cosa que que te dabas cuenta por el tono, ¿verdad?	Ehm, I mean, it's a little it's something you noticed because of the tone, you know?
62	porque no eran un como, bueno	because it wasn't a tone like, well
63	qué está haciendo acá y haciendo allá	what are you doing here and there
64	te dabas cuenta que el tono era un poco más pesado	you realized that the tone was a little more rude
65	y poco a poco te vas, me fui dando cuenta que	and progressively you notice, I noticed that
66	ni siquiera tenían interés realmente en llamar para corroborar los datos ni nada	they didn't even had interest in calling to check the personal info or anything
67	sino era simplemente hacerme pasar un mal rato durante el control, ¿verdad?	but they were just giving me a hard time during the check, you know?

68	ehm, cuando vieron que ya mostré también	ehm, when they noticed that I also showed
69	que yo también mostré molestia	that I also showed discomfort
70	entonces decisieron irse	then they decided to leave
71	me devolvieron mis documentos	they gave me my documents back
72	como te digo, o sea, repito	like I say, also, I repeat
73	nunca llamaron para corroborar los datos, eh	they never called to check the personal info, eh
74	y se fueron	and they left
75	y no controlaron a nadie más en el vagón, ¿verdad?	and they didn't check anyone else in the train car, you know?
76	entonces, ehm, me quedé un poco confundido	then, ehm, I got a little confused
77	obviamente molesto	upset obviously
78	y uno de los otros pasajeros que estaba ahí	and one of the other passengers who was there
79	sólo se volteó, ¿verdad?	just turned around, you know?
80	quedaba, habíamos, estaba sentado al otro lado	he was, he sat on the other side
81	no al otro lado del tren	not on the other side of the train
82	pero habíamos, ehm, de los asientos de la izquierda	but we were, ehm, on the seats on the left
83	él estaba exactamente en la misma posición pero a la derecha	he was in exactly the same position [as me] but on the right hand side
84	se volteó, me habló	he turned around, talked to me

85	y me dijo que lamentaba mucho que me tocase, eh, vivir eso, ¿verdad?	and said that he was very sorry that I had to deal, eh, with this, you know?
86	que no me lo tomara muy personal	that I shouldn't take it too personally
87	y yo le dije pues que sí	and I said: "But of course"
88	uno trata de no tomárselo personal	you try not to take it personally
89	pero al final de cuentas, eh	but in the end, eh
90	al no ser un control rutinario	because it isn't a routine control
91	te das cuenta que lo te están dando diciendo de forma implícita es	you realize that what they are implicitly telling you is
92	tú no perteneces acá, ¿verdad?	you don't belong here, you know?

** Only clearly recorded intervention of the interviewer in this fragment*

The narrated episode falls under the interactional script "police control", which is strongly shaped by the conditions of institutional communication. The narrative contains an orientation (lines 1-25), the narration of the incident proper (lines 26-77), and the coda (78-92). Referential and evaluative components are spread throughout the text.

The first lines of the orientation frame the narrated incident as problematic (*muy feo* 'very awful', 1), provide general information about the interactional script ("police control"), the setting (train, 2), and the narrator's situation and motives (trip to Switzerland for job interview, 3). Section 4-11 contains a description of the general situation and it is, at the same time, revealing with regard to the way how the informant constructs his "face" as a migrant in Germany. In lines 4-9, he categorizes himself as a "foreigner", positioning himself against both (German?) mainstream society and other migrant groups, because of his dark skin color. Although it is not obvious at this point why he gives this information, we can infer from Grice's maxim of relation that it is relevant. In line 10, the informant provides a description of the temporal and political juncture of that time (migration "crisis" in Germany), and recognizes the necessity of routine police controls against this backdrop (11), which may be interpreted as an expression of his fundamental understanding of the situation and his general willingness to cooperate with German institutions as another facet of his "face". This aspect will be further elaborated on and reinforced in the course of the narration. Next, two perlocutionary effects are presented

as referential facts (experiencing surprise in 12 and confusion in 18), and some evaluative information is provided about the reasons for these reactions (unexpected time and place of the control, 13-18). The referential statement that the agents' behavior was blatant (20) is evaluated against the description of the informant's activities immediately before the control: he was reading comfortably and doing nothing that could have made him suspicious or disruptive to other passengers (22-25). At the same time, it may be read as an anticipation and overall evaluation of the policemen's conduct. This section further supports the informant's self-identity as a "normal", well-educated and inoffensive person. The arrival of the policemen (26) marks the beginning of the problematic encounter. Although it is not explicitly stated, the hearer can infer from previously given information that the informant was selected for control because of his skin color – that means, because of what he considers to be a visible difference from other people in the train and from the non-migrant people in Germany. The narrative comes back to this point at the end of the complicating action (60).

The description of the complicating action starts in line 26. The referential framework of this part is made up nearly exclusively by only two types of verbal lexemes: speech act verbs such as *cuestionar* 'to question' (28), *preguntar* / *hacer una pregunta* 'to ask (a question)' (47, 52, 56), *pedir* 'to ask (for)' (45), *explicar* 'explain' (49), and *decir* 'say' (54, 57), as well as verbs that describe mental states and processes, among them *darse cuenta* 'to realize' (58, 59, 64, 65), *molestarse* / *mostrar molestia* 'to get angry / show anger' (58, 69), *ver* 'see, understand' (68), and *quedarse confundido* / *molesto* 'to become confused / angry' (76-77). The events these words refer to form a chain of action which functions as the referential skeleton of the narrative ("What happened?"). They are in temporal juncture and cannot be reversed (cf. Labov & Waletzky 1967: 25), because each one triggers the next one (compare also the frequent use of adjacency pairs such as *me preguntaron* 'they asked me' – *les expliqué* 'I explained to them'; *me preguntaron* 'they asked me' – *y les dije* 'and I told them', etc.). Embedded within this structure we find quotations of the interlocutor's utterances (or **propositions**) in direct (38[7], 57) or indirect (29-32, 47-48, 52) speech, which elaborate the verbal actions expressed in the speech act verbs. The interrogatives (cf. *qué, por qué*) and subordinating conjunctions (*que*) used in these sequences support the illocutions expressed in the verb of the independent clause (i.e., asking for and providing information).

Thus, the complicating action is presented as a sequence of questions, answers, and cognitive and emotional responses to those speech acts – in other words, a succession of verbal actions (**illocutions**) and their consequences (**perlocutionary effects**). Interestingly, despite their allegedly "subjective" character, the perlocutionary effects are presented by the informant as integral elements of the development of the action, on equal terms with the more "objectively" observable behavioral aspects of the situation.

At this point, we can already conclude from the referential structure and content of the incident that it falls under the category of verbal violence, because the perlocutionary effects that are reported to emerge from the verbal behavior (confusion, anger) harm the informant's wellbeing. However, we cannot say how or why

[7] This is a fictional proposition which the informant attributes to a policeman in an alternative world.

they emerge without considering the evaluative information ("So what"?).

The evaluative segments in lines 33-38, 40-44 and 60-67 describe different kinds of circumstances of the incident, as well as the narrator's inferences from them. They turn the enumeration of events into a coherent narrative by establishing conceptual links between the different kinds of verbal actions (illocutive acts) and their cognitive and emotional consequences (perlocutionary effects). It is this very information that helps us to understand why the informant experiences the interaction as an instance of verbal violence.

In the referential section in lines 26-32, the narrator reports the arrival of the policemen and the beginning of the questioning. These referential facts are evaluated in line 33 to 38, where the narrator marks them as something unusual (cf. *y eso que*, 33), coming back to his previous statement (13-17) according to which the time and place of the control did not make sense within a normal police control, because there were enhanced controls of people entering Germany, but not leaving the country. This reflection leads him to the conclusion that the control was not a routine procedure (39).

In the following evaluative section (40-44), the narrator gives more reasons for this interpretation by contrasting the incident with his previous experience with police controls in Germany. According to him, the officers normally ask for the identification document and call an agency in order to obtain confirmation of the migrant's identity and legal status, but, this time, there is no telephone call. Against this backdrop, the informant evaluates the agent's behavior as inadequate and careless (40).

From line 45 onwards, the informant returns to his referential description. The further development of the interaction is described as a succession of directive speech acts and responses to them (asking for, presentation and checking of identification document in 45-46, questions and answers regarding the informant's destination and plans in 47-51, and repeated questions about the content of the informant's suitcase in 52-56). The informant's offer to open the suitcase (57) comes as the culmination of the complicating action, which triggers a reaction that finally leads to the solution: Having noticed his anger, the policemen leave (68ff). Although on the surface level the informant is uttering a commissive speech act, the discourse marker *¿saben qué?* 'you know what?', and the description of the perlocutionary effect of this speech act on the agents ("ya se dieron cuenta que me **empecé a molestar**", 'and then they noticed that I was beginning to get upset', 58) suggest that this utterance may actually be interpreted as an expressive speech act (expressing disapproval about the policemen's behavior), with a certain degree of aggression.[8] This is the only moment within the narrative of the control when the informant speaks out and takes the initiative, instead of just reacting to the policemen. Thus, this important turning point in the narrative is also presented as a moment of personal empowerment for the informant. It is an act of "subversive rebellion" (Porila 2015: 221) which momentarily suspends the power asymmetries between participants, and probably serves as an outlet for the frustration and aggression the informant has accumulated up to this point (ibid.). His renewed statement that

[8] When he quotes himself in line 57, prosodic features such as a change in voice quality and in pitch register (higher than expected by questions) support this interpretation.

the control was not routine (59) refers back to line 39, but this time it is used as a justification for his reaction, rather than a conclusion from the policemen's behavior.

What follows is a sequence of evaluative information where the narrator insists once more that the control was abnormal because the officers did not make the expected telephone call (66). Then, he goes one step further in his interpretation: Having made clear that the interactions are not in line with his expectations regarding the interactional script "police control", and that the agents were not interested in his identity or legal status, he rejects the surface illocutions of the agents' questions. As he must assume that their behavior is intentional according to Grice's relevance principle, he infers that the policemen's questions are only a camouflage for verbal aggression. Against this background, he concludes that the perlocutionary effect he is experiencing (anger, confusion) is actually intended by his interlocutors (cf. "[la intención] era simplemente hacerme pasar un mal rato durante el control ¿verdad?" '[the intention] was only to give me a hard time during the control, you know?', 67). Prosodic features of the policemen's utterances are highlighted as an additional clue which guided him towards this interpretation (cf. *tono pesado,* 'rude tone', 61-64). Taking up an element already mentioned in the orientation (see above), the narrator assumes racism as a motive for the allegedly aggressive behavior of the policemen (60).

The presentation of the incident proper ends with the referential description of the policemen giving him his papers back and leaving (68-74). In a kind of closing section, two elements that appeared earlier as evaluative information are elevated to the status of referential facts (cf. their use in *pretérito perfecto simple*): The narrator re-emphasizes that the policemen definitely did not make a phone call (73), and that they *definitely* did not control anybody else in the train car but him (75). This leaves him again confused and angry (76-77).

The coda begins with line 78. In a kind of addendum, the narrator relates another passenger's reaction to the scene, and draws a general conclusion from the incident. The referential parts of this section describe how a witness of the police control turns around to him and expresses his regret about the behavior of the agents, recommending him not to take it too personally (78-87). However, the informant takes a different view (87-88). What follows in lines 89 to 92 is a kind of justification for his disagreement with the passenger, which is at the same time an overall evaluation of the incident. The informant highlights once more his fundamental willingness to accept the reduction of interactional scope that characterizes institutional communication (88), as one facet of his self-identity as a migrant. However, given that the interaction did not correspond to his expectations regarding the interactional script "police control" (90), he infers that the policemen were actually abusing their institutional power to commit an act of *interpersonal* aggression and violence against him. Unlike institutional violence that strikes regardless of the individual case, the agents' behavior is felt as a targeted attack against him as a person, although he had done nothing to deserve it (compare the construction of his "face" as a cooperative, well-educated migrant in the orientation). The coda culminates in a fictional reformulation of the policemen's alleged verbal aggressions in terms of a direct speech act ("tú no perteneces acá", 'you don't belong here', 92), which stands as a recapitulation of the whole incident. Thus, the

illocution the informant assumes behind the policemen's questioning is actually an act of interpersonal offense and exclusion.

In sum, the informant experiences the police control as an instance of covert aggression and verbal violence. The presence of verbal violence can be directly deduced from the referential organization of complicating action, which basically comes as a chain of references to the speech acts, together with their negative perlocutionary effects (confusion and anger). The evaluative parts provide information about the cues that led the narrator to infer covert aggressive illocutionary intentions from the overt illocution 'asking for information', which explain the perlocutionary effects. Among them, he mentions racialized criteria for his selection for the control, its unusual time and place according to his previous knowledge, the discrepancy between the agents' verbal behavior and his expectations concerning the genre "police control" (especially the lack of the phone call and the questions for the motive of the journey and the content of the suitcase), as well as prosodic features of the agents' utterances. Against this backdrop, the incident is framed as a unique and personal case of intentional aggression and discrimination because of visible difference, and not as a manifestation of "blind" institutional or structural violence. However, the institutional character of the interaction adds to the illocutionary force of the aggression, because it restrains the informant's possibilities for action due to the asymmetric and compulsory character of communication with institutional interlocutors. For example, the informant cannot refuse to communicate with the policemen or act with overt aggression without risking sanctions, as he could do if one of the passengers started to attack him verbally. This is the reason why he also draws on covert verbal aggression at one point in the interaction (57).

It's important to note that it's impossible to know if the interpersonal violence perceived by the informant was intended or not. For some of the contextual clues mentioned in the narrative, alternative interpretations could be envisaged.[9] However, the aim of our analysis is not to reconstruct what the police men *really* intended to do with their words, or to decide if the informant is right with his interpretation, but to gain insights into which salient linguistic and extra-linguistic cues guide migrants towards experiencing interactions as violent.

5. Conclusions

The present contribution is a first approximation to Latin American migrants' experiences with verbal violence in German institutions. Within the VIOLIN project, we propose a migrant-centered approach based on personal accounts of problematic interactions in institutional contexts (Critical Incidents). These are analyzed combining SAT with Narrative Analysis, in order to gain insights into how the perception of violence emerges from the interplay between linguistic features and contextual factors, under the conditions of institutional communication. As our analysis of the incident "Police control at the border" has shown, it's not primarily the inherent power asymmetries and the compulsory character of institutional communication which produce the perception of violence in the informant, but rather the feeling of being the target of an individual act of aggression, othering and exclusion under the cloak of institutional

[9] For example, the control's time and place and the agents' interest in the motive of the trip and the content of the suitcase would not be unusual if the control was a customs control.

needs. Thus, the institutional context does not produce verbal violence per se, but it adds to the "face" damaging effect of the agents' behavior by significantly reducing the migrant's options for action, leaving him more vulnerable than in other possible scenarios. This particular experience seems to be consistent with the rest of our corpus. However, further investigation is needed to provide an overall picture of verbal violence against migrants in German institutions.

References

Atkinson, Paul & Sara Delamont. 2006. Rescuing narrative from qualitative research. *Narrative Inquiry* 16.1: 164-172.

Austin, John L. 1962. *How to do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Barak, Gregg. 2003. *Violence and Nonviolence. Pathways to Understanding*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Becker-Mrotzek, Michael. 2001. Gespräche in Ämtern und Behörden. In Klaus Brinker, Gerd Antos, Wolfgang Heinemann & Sven F. Sager (eds.), *Text- und Gesprächslinguistik. Ein internationales Handbuch zeitgenössischer Forschung = Linguistics of text and conversation: an international handbook of contemporary research*, pp. 1505-1525. Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton.

Bergmann, Jörg & Thomas Luckmann. 1995. Reconstructive genres of everyday communication. In Uta Quasthoff (ed.), *Aspects of Oral Communication*, pp. 289-403. Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton.

Bonacchi, Silvia. 2017. Sprachliche Aggression beschreiben, verstehen und erklären. Theorie und Methodologie einer sprachbezogenen Aggressionsforschung. In Silvia Bonacchi (ed.), *Verbale Aggression. Multidisziplinäre Zugänge zur verletzenden Macht der Sprache*, pp. 1-32. Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton.

Butterfield, Lee D., William A. Borgen, Norman E. Amundson & Asa-Sophia T. Maglio. 2005. Fifty years of the critical incident technique: 1954 – 2004 and beyond. *Qualitative Research* 5.4: 475-497.

Culpeper, Jonathan. 2005. Impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show: The weakest link. *Journal of Politeness Research. Language, Behaviour, Culture* 1.1: 35-72.

De Fina, Anna. 2012. *Analyzing Narrative. Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Drew, Paul & John Heritage. 1992. Analyzing talk at work: an introduction. In Paul Drew & John Heritage (eds.), *Talk at Work. Interaction in Institutional Settings*, pp. 3-65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ehlich, Konrad & Jochen Rehbein. 1994. Institutionsanalyse. Prolegomena zur Untersuchung von Kommunikation in Institutionen. In Gisela Brünner & Gabriele Graefen (eds.), *Texte und Diskurse. Methoden und Forschungsergebnisse der funktionalen Pragmatik*, pp. 287-327. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Flanagan, John C. 1954. The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin* 51.4: 327-358.

Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual. Essays on Face-to-face Behavior*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Grice, H. P. 1975. Logic and Conversation. In Peter Cole & J. L. Morcan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*, vol.3., pp. 41-58. New York: Academic Press.

Havryliv, Oksana. 2017. Verbale Aggression: das Spektrum der Funktionen. *Linguistik Online* 82.3 [https://bop.unibe.ch/linguistik-online/article/view/3713] (accessed 15 January 2020)

Hee, Katrin. 2012. *Polizeivernehmungen von Migranten. Eine gesprächsanalytische Studie interkultureller Interaktionen in Institutionen*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter.

Herrmann, Steffen K. & Hannes Kuch. 2007. Verletzende Worte. Eine Einleitung. In Steffen K. Herrmann, Sybille Krämer & Hannes Kuch (eds.), *Verletzende Worte. Die Grammatik sprachlicher Missachtung*, pp. 7-30. Bielefeld: transcript.

Hinnenkamp, Volker. 1985. Zwangskommunikative Interaktion zwischen Gastarbeitern und deutscher Behörde. In Jochen Rehbein (ed.), *Interkulturelle Kommunikation*, pp. 276-298. Tübingen: Narr.

Iadicola, Peter & Anson Shupe. 2013. *Violence, Inequality, and Human Freedom*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Krämer, Sybille. 2007. Sprache als Gewalt oder: Warum verletzen Worte? In Steffen K. Herrmann, Sybille Krämer & Hannes Kuch (eds.), *Verletzende Worte. Die Grammatik sprachlicher Missachtung*, pp. 31-48. Bielefeld: transcript.

Labov, William. 1997. *Some Further Steps in Narrative Analysis*. [https://www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/sfs.html] (accessed 1 February 2020)

Labov, William & Joshua Waletzky. 1967. Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In June Helm (ed.), *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts. Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society*, pp.12-44. S.l.: American Ethnological Society.

Musolff, Andreas. 2015. Dehumanizing metaphors in UK immigrant debates in press and online media. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 3.1: 41-56.

Porila, Astrid. 2015. Kooperation und Provokation in der Ausländerbehörde. In Ulla Tuomarla (ed.). *Miscommunication and Verbal Violence. Du malentendu à la violence verbale. Misskommunikation und verbale Gewalt*, pp. 211-222. Helsinki: Société Néophilologique.

Rheindorf, Markus & Ruth Wodak. 2018. Borders, fences, and limits—Protecting Austria from refugees: Metadiscursive negotiation of meaning in the current refugee crisis. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 16.1-2: 15-38.

Rosenberg, Katharina. 2014. *Interkulturelle Behördenkommunikation. Eine gesprächsanalytische Untersuchung zu Verständigungsproblemen zwischen Migranten und Behördenmitarbeitern in Berlin und Buenos Aires.* Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton.

Searle, John R. 1975. Indirect speech acts. In Peter Cole & J. L. Morcan (eds.). *Syntax and Semantics*, vol.3. *Speech Acts*, pp. 59-82. New York: Academic Press.

Searle, John R. 2012. *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weinrich, Harald. 1964. *Tempus: Besprochene und erzählte Welt*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.