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FANGS AND POWER: An analysis of discursive patterns of discrimination in the American TV series *True Blood*

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Abstract: The American TV series *True Blood* uses vampires allegorically to represent disenfranchised minorities. This paper aims at accounting for discursive patterns of discrimination in it through a critical discourse-semantic analysis of its illocutionary subjects' speech acts. To achieve this, we integrate a theory of semantic modality and a dimensional theory of meaning to the general framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. The method of dimensional analysis of meaning, aided by an analysis of context and of discourse strategies, allows us to identify 13 discursive patterns of discrimination, which are general enough to carry over to the analysis of both fictional and factual discourse.

Subjects: Language & Power; Discourse Analysis; Semantics

Keywords: discrimination; *True Blood*; semantic modality; semantic discourse analysis; critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Discrimination has been a much-discussed issue in recent years. For the purposes of this paper, we will understand discrimination as *the systematic exclusion of members of a group, based on the criterion of their belonging to said group*. A fundamental assumption of research on the reproduction of

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Ernesto Wong García and William Gómez Fernández conduct their research within the Semantics and Discourse Studies group, at University of Havana (Cuba). Their research covers areas such as discourse semantics, discourse analysis (including fictional discourse analysis and its socio-cultural and historical aspects), and Critical Discourse Analysis. Specifically, the authors have focused on the expression of speaker subjectivity in discourse, the formal and semantic procedures involved, and how this relates to the wider social and cultural structures in which the speaker is enmeshed. The research presented in this paper was conducted as part of the institutional project "Semantic Discourse Analysis" of the University of Havana.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The American TV series *True Blood* uses vampires allegorically to represent disenfranchised minorities, and it depicts their struggle for social emancipation, intertwined with personal narratives. Dialog is, of course, an essential component of a TV series, and it is through the characters' discourse that discrimination against vampires (and humans) is most evident in this case. In this paper, the authors analyze a sample of the characters' discourse to show how language is not only a vehicle, but a tool in the creation and reproduction of discrimination. This is most clearly seen in the way in which the characters' discourse has been structured, specifically its meaning. This is a case study, and as such, the generalizations and mechanisms identified in it carry over to the analysis of other discourses, both fictional and factual, and may help identify other instances of discriminatory discourse.

discrimination, mainly of that conducted by T. A. van Dijk and like-minded analysts, has been that the acquisition process of discriminatory actions is largely discursive (Van Dijk, 1992). Thus, the analysis of discourse, even fictional discourse, can provide privileged insight into the patterns and mechanisms that operate in the reproduction of discrimination.

This paper represents the culmination of little under two years of research, and it aims to account for discursive patterns of discrimination in the American TV series *True Blood* (Ball, 2008–2014), broadcasted on the premium cable network HBO, in the United States, from 2008 until 2014. This series was chosen because, as we shall see, it makes an allegorical use of vampires, who are made to “stand for” other disenfranchised minorities. It is our belief that the patterns and mechanisms identified here carry over to the analysis of factual discourse.

Our research was conducted within the framework of the theory of semantic modality and the dimensional theory of meaning, first developed by Caballero Díaz (1995/2014, 2002a, 2002b) and Galbán Pozo (2003) to account for the subjective contents of discourse, as they stem from the speaker’s psychological stances toward what is being talked about.

We have worked with a corpus of speech acts gathered from the series (a sample of which can be found in Appendix A), and have used mainly the methods of textual analysis, dimensional analysis of meaning (for the description of the valuating subjects through the semantic analysis of their speech acts), and context analysis (for the identification of the contextual elements relevant to the analyzed speech acts). We want to make it clear that, even though we have taken speech acts as units of analysis, we do not consider our research to be (purely) pragmatic in nature.

Section 1.1 of this paper gives a brief description of the TV series, and Section 2 presents the relevant elements of our theoretical framework: a conception of context, the theory of semantic modality, and the dimensional theory of meaning. Section 3 presents our analysis, prefaced by a description of the corpus and of the methodology used. The discussion covers the opening credits of the show, general remarks on the use of valuations throughout the series, and an analysis of two discourse strategies. Finally, Section 4 presents our conclusions.

1.1. True Blood

The American TV series *True Blood* aired on the premium cable network HBO, in the United States, from 2008 until 2014, running for seven seasons. Set in the town of Bon Temps, Louisiana, its fictional universe is premised on the notion that vampires exist, unbeknownst to the majority of humans until two years before the story begins, when the development of synthetic blood (“Tru Blood” [sic]) allowed vampires to “come out of the coffin”, as they no longer needed human blood to survive. This so-called “Great Revelation” has split vampires into two factions: those who wish to integrate into mainstream society by campaigning for citizenship and equal rights, and those who think that the inherently violent nature of vampires makes human–vampire co-existence impossible.

The show explores several contemporary issues such as the struggle for equal rights, discrimination and violence against minorities, the role of faith and religion, and the control and influence of mass media. Vampires have their own bars, their hotels, their TV channels. The social interaction between humans and vampires, as portrayed in the series, is a clear reflection of a discriminatory reality: interspecies romantic relationships are condemned, vampire culture is attacked, and we are shown a society that apparently stands ready to give vampires equal opportunities and rights, but that is actually anything but.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Context

We will be working with a general conception of context, understood as *the structure involving all the properties and attributes of a social situation that are relevant to the production and interpretation of discourse*, such as the setting (time, location, circumstances), the participants and their communicative roles and goals, shared world knowledge, and specific procedures (specifically press conferences and interviews).

In the case of fictional discourse, speech acts are performed by subjects who are ontologically distant from both the author and the recipient, i.e. they belong to different worlds. At the same time, fictional discourse is produced and interpreted by real subjects belonging to our world, immersed in real historical, social and cultural structures and processes. Therefore, for the analysis of the TV series *True Blood*, we feel the need to establish a distinction between what we will call *internal* context and *external* context.

The internal context, as we understand it, encompasses all the elements mentioned above—historical, social and cultural setting, relationship between speakers, time and place of utterance, world knowledge, procedures—, as they obtain in the fictional world constructed by the story. It refers to situational factors that are experienced by the fictional, ontologically distant subjects (characters).

The external context, on the other hand, comprises the same kinds of elements, but as they obtain in the real world, in which the author and the recipient both exist. It refers to the situational factors that come to bear during the production and interpretation of the fictional discourse. In the case of a TV series, the external context pertains to the historical, social and cultural structures and processes in which the writer(s) and the audience are enmeshed.

In the case of *True Blood*, because the story is set in contemporary times, and because the humans depicted in it are intended to depict actual humans like those who are part of the series' audience, many of the elements that constitute the external context of the show are reproduced in its internal context.

2.2. Semantic modality

Caballero Díaz (1995/2014, 2002b) developed a theory of semantic modality, as opposed to logical modality. The latter refers to logical modes that determine the conditions under which a proposition is true or false. The former deals instead with all sorts of subjective contents of discourse reflecting the speaker's psychological attitudes toward what is being talked about. It is possible to class these subjective contents according to the kind of subjectivity involved.

The main kind of semantic modality is necessarily that of *valuation*, that is, the axiological stances assumed by the speaker, who can thus be described, according to the modal values she exhibits, as “approving”, “disapproving”, “ambiguous” (somewhere in between) or “ambivalent” (both at once). However, Galbán Pozo (2003) described five other kinds of semantic modality, which we will sketch here in no particular order:

- (a) that of *interest*, which has to do with the extent to which the objects (fail to) draw the speakers attention—in which case she can be described as “interested”, “uninterested” or “indifferent”—, or (fail to) constitute a motive for action—in which case she can be described as “eager” (interested without obligation), “committed” (interested with obligation), “compelled” (uninterested with obligation), or “excluding” (uninterested without obligation);
- (b) that of *certainty*, which has to do with how sure the speaker is about what she is saying—and she can be described as “sure” or “unsure”—, and with how determined the speaker is to embark on a given course of action—where she can be described as “determined” or “hesitant”;

- (c) that of *loyalty*, which relates to the modal values of “sincerity” and “insincerity” (correlation between discourse and mental states), “good intention” and “bad intention” (ethical-intentional aspect of discourse), and “ingenuity” and “astuteness” (cognitive-intellectual aspect of discourse);
- (d) that of *affectivity*, realized on three levels of tension, namely “like/dislike” (lesser tension), “affection/disaffection” (middle tension) and “love/hatred” (greatest tension); and
- (e) that of *expressiveness*, which has to do with the speaker’s emotional states toward the objects and phenomena that are talked about, and according to which the speaker can be described as “happy”, “sad”, “angry”, “afraid”, “surprised”, “uneasy”, “reassured”, etc.

2.3. The dimensional theory of meaning

These modal values are only part of the meaning of utterances, which Caballero Díaz (1995/2014) conceives of as a complex entity that integrates modal, interactive, and referential contents, each of which constitute one of the so-called *dimensions* of meaning.

Interactive contents have to do with the speaker’s pragmatic intentions (illocutionary force), and they constitute the *illocutionary dimension* of meaning. Valiative speech acts are subcategorized into three types of act:

- (a) *evaluative* speech acts (*evaluations*), which are transcendental, institutional valuations performed by a subject who is socially sanctioned to do so, and whose valuations have objective consequences;
- (b) *appraising* speech acts (*appraisals*), which are personal, non-transcendental valuations with no objective consequences, seeing as they reflect the subject’s personal opinions; and
- (c) *hierarchizing* speech acts (*hierarchizations*), which can be either appraising or evaluative, and which establish a hierarchical ordering of the valuated object relative to another object or set of objects.

The other, non-valiative kinds of modal values are not associated to any specific illocutionary force, which means that they can surface in any kind of speech act. Modal values, as described in the previous section, constitute the *modal dimension* of meaning.

The object being talked about, at which the modal values are directed, is characterized by a set of features that constitute the *referential dimension* of meaning. These features reflect the ontological class to which the object is identified as belonging (human, non-human, animate, inanimate, physical, non-physical, etc.), the object’s focalized property or properties (its quality, its quantity, its behavior or its state), and the relationship into which the object enters with other objects, including the speaker (causation, manipulation, control, permission, deprivation, appropriation, conjunction–disjunction, locative features).

For the modality of *valuation*, we can also specify the domain of (social) reality in which the object is judged, and speak of general valuations, as well as ethical–psychological, intellectual, esthetic, practical, physical, physical–biological, ideological, sensory, and juridical ones.

3. Analysis of the TV series *True Blood*

This section will present our analysis, and discussion thereof, of a corpus of speech acts gathered from the TV series *True Blood*. Our analysis will be focused on identifying discursive mechanisms of discrimination in individual speech acts, as well as in larger discourse fragments.

3.1. Description of the corpus

During our research, we gathered a corpus of 128 speech acts, taken from seasons 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the show, performed by different illocutionary subjects (characters). Our selection process was guided by the following criteria:

- the speech act displays an opposition between humans and vampires;
- the speech act is performed in a confrontational (internal) context, rather than in a cooperative one;
- the illocutionary subject displays an axiological stance toward the referent of her discourse (*valuation*); and
- the illocutionary subject displays other modal stances (*interest, certainty, loyalty, affectivity and expressiveness*).

These criteria were collectively sufficient for establishing the corpus. That being said, they were not all individually necessary. Consequently, some speech acts met some, although not all of the criteria.

3.2. Methodology

The main method we used was the method of dimensional analysis of meaning, which allowed us to describe the meaning of speech acts according to the theory presented in section 3. We also analyzed, whenever it was relevant, the linguistic, formal devices involved in the construction of meaning (grammar).

For the analysis of the subjects' discourse strategies, we selected two larger discourse fragments and segmented them into smaller units of analysis, where a clear and definite pragmatic intention was identifiable, and analyzed them individually according to their illocutionary, modal and referential contents. We then proceeded to describe how these individual units came together to form a macro-speech act reflecting the relevant contents assumed by the speaker in her strategy. In addition, we analyzed some formal and stylistic features of the subjects' discourse, insofar as these had some bearing on the execution of their strategy.

3.3. Discussion of the analysis

3.3.1. Opening credits

The first element of the series that we will analyze and comment is the opening credits. They begin by showing scenes from Louisiana's most "sinister" landscapes, such as swamps and forests. They quickly move on to show rural, and therefore more traditional, scenes, specifically religious scenes with Black gospel choirs. Every now and then, we see scenes of a sexual nature that are only on screen for a fraction of a second, and that are also set, we infer, in Louisiana. These scenes get progressively longer, until we get a stable alternation between traditional-religious and sexual scenes. This seems to suggest a fundamental duality in the depiction of the state of Louisiana, a state that is presented to us as layered in the best of cases, and as institutionally hypocritical in the worst.

At this point, we begin to see short clips of authentic footage depicting key elements of the history of Louisiana: scenes of police brutality against black people on the streets, and scenes showing Ku Klux Klan assemblies, with a close-up of a young boy wearing the white robe. These clips are now alternating with the traditional-religious and sexual scenes commented above.

In a relatively longer scene, we see a church billboard, and on it, the words "GOD HATES FANGS", a play on the slogan "God Hates Fags", a discriminatory and offensive way to refer to male homosexuals. This is the first and only explicit reference to vampires in the show's opening credits. On the surface, it is an assertive act—it represents a state of affairs—, but it is also a valutive speech act. Specifically, it constitutes a negative evaluation (because of the institutional and transcendental character that the institution of religion gives to the valuation) of the quality of a non-human, namely vampires. This object of the valuation is reduced, by means of metonymy, to one of its physical features (the fangs), which also contributes to the pejorative sense of the speech act. The valuating subject is marked with the modal values "sure" because her speech act is couched in institutionalized faith; and "hatred", because an important aspect of faith thus understood is the identification

of one's own feelings with those of the worshipped deity. This valuative speech act falls within the ethical-psychological, physical-biological, and ideological domains.

The elements discussed above contribute information that helps the viewer (and the analyst) situate his- or herself, constituting part of both the internal and the external context of the series. This is a show that will oscillate between moral extremes, with a story that will be told in a rather “dark” tone. We are given relevant elements of Louisiana's history of discrimination, which resonate with the atmosphere of discrimination we still experience today everywhere else, particularly in the United States. Finally, we are situated in a world where vampires exist and are the target of systematic and institutional hatred. However, this vampire element is diluted in the rest of the information, and the opening credits as a whole seem to support a conclusion we ourselves have come to reach: this is not a show about vampires.

3.3.2. *Valuative speech acts*

There are some general, quantitative remarks to be made on how valuations are used in the series as a whole, in speech acts that fit the criteria presented above.

There is a predominance of appraisals and evaluations over hierarchizations, which are rarely performed alone. The evaluations are performed using the authority invested on the valuating subjects by their socially recognized status as holders of certain positions in power structures. This status is most often derived from religion (in the case of a religious leader), human law (in the case of elected officials), or vampire law (in the case of the vampire King of Mississippi). The valuations are overwhelmingly negative: the vast majority of the valuating subjects who were analyzed are marked with the modal value “disapproving”. This is to be expected, if we consider that an important situational factor here is the clash between human and vampire interests, in a context where, as we have said, vampires are the target of systematic hatred.

It is worth mentioning the disproportionately more frequent presence of the modal value “sure”, as compared to other values. This is true for both appraisals and evaluations, and it is mainly due to the fact that negative, discriminatory valuations are usually premised on unquestioned beliefs about the referent, which prompt the subject to display a maximum of certainty about the content of her speech.

Focalized properties are most often those of quality and behavior, and they refer almost always to objects marked as human and non-human. The valuations thus have as their object both vampires and humans, and in the vast majority of cases, this feature of the valuated object alternates with that of the valuating subject: a human subject negatively values a non-human object, and a non-human subject negatively values a human object. This reflects an interesting fact about the series: discrimination can go both ways.

The general uses of the feature of conjunction-disjunction are also worth discussing. The feature is used in four main ways throughout the corpus: (1) to include (conjunction) or exclude (disjunction) something or someone in or from a category; (2) to establish (disjunction) or remove (conjunction) an opposition between vampires and humans; (3) to mark the fulfillment (conjunction), or lack thereof (disjunction), of certain criteria used as reference, such as value systems, expectations, and beliefs; and (4) to resort to stereotypes (conjunction) in characterizing the valuated object, both vampire and human. The following speech acts illustrate this:

- (1) (Uttered by a vampire) We are citizens, we pay taxes, we deserve basic civil rights just like everyone else. (S01E01, 00:00:57)—Removal of opposition between humans and vampires (conjunction), based on the latter's behavior.

- (2) (Uttered by a vampire) Vampires often turn on those who trust them, you know? We don't have human values like you. (S01E01, 00:26:10)—Lack of fulfillment (disjunction) of a given value system, as shown in a given behavior.
- (3) (Uttered by a human, about a vampire) How the hell could she [file a missing persons report], Sookie, when the person that's missing ain't even a real person? (S03E01, 00:27:53)—Exclusion (disjunction) of a vampire from a category, based on their quality.
- (4) (Uttered by a human) You violated me and terrorized me because that's what vampires do. (S03E09, 00:51:44)—Resorting to a stereotype (conjunction) in valuating the object's behavior.

Finally, the valuations in the sample fall mainly within the ethical-psychological and physical-biological domains. This too is to be expected, as it reflects the confrontational, discriminatory context in which vampires and humans are enmeshed, where the main criterion for exclusion and negative valuation is the object's belonging to a different biological species.

3.3.3. *Discourse strategies*

Instead of reporting our analysis of individual speech acts, which space concerns prevent us from, we believe that a richer analysis is possible if we take larger fragments of discourse by a single speaker, because it allows us to see how different speech acts combine to materialize the subject's discriminatory discursive strategy.

To this end, we have selected two interventions: one by a vampire, King Russell Edgington of Mississippi, the other by a human, Governor Truman Burrell of Louisiana, both of them televised, but under different conditions, as we will see. We have selected these two subjects because they are both political figures with socially conferred and recognized status and authority, who are speaking not as individuals, but as representatives of their respective communities. In this sense, both interventions are analogous.

Russell Edgington's intervention occurs after he has openly rebelled against vampire authority (to which he is accountable, even if he is a king) and rejected the American Vampire League's (AVL) attempts at equality. He interrupts a newscast segment, on a human TV network, about the AVL's efforts to pass the Vampire Rights Amendment and, after violently murdering the news anchor on live TV, he produces the following:

- (5) Russell Edgington (on TV): "Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Russell Edgington, and I have been a vampire for nearly 3,000 years. Now, the American Vampire League wishes to perpetuate the notion that we are just like you, and I suppose in a few small ways we are. We're narcissists. We care only about getting what we want, no matter what the cost, just like you. Global warming, perpetual war, toxic waste, child labor, torture, genocide! That's a small price to pay for your SUVs and your flat-screen TVs, your blood diamonds, your designer jeans, your absurd, garish McMansions! Futile symbols of permanence to quell your quivering, spineless souls. But No. In the end, we are nothing like you. We are ... immortal. Because we drink the *True Blood*, blood that is living, organic and human. And that is the truth the AVL wishes to conceal from you, because let's face it, eating people is a tough sell these days. So they put on their friendly faces to pass their beloved VRA [Vampire Rights Amendment]. But make no mistake, mine is the true face of vampires! Why would we seek equal rights? You are not our equals! We will eat you, after we eat your children. Now time for the weather. Tiffany?" (S03E09, 00:55:53)

We will proceed by dividing this intervention into smaller fragments and analyzing them individually.

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Russell Edgington, and I have been a vampire for nearly 3000 years.

He begins by introducing himself to the audience, giving three pieces of information: his name (Russell Edgington), the group he belongs to and for which he is speaking (“I have been a vampire”), and his age (“for nearly 3000 years”). This last piece of information is not gratuitous. Its purpose is to appeal to the speaker’s authority: he is very old, much older than any other vampire the audience might have met, so he knows what he is talking about. This, combined with the fact that he is speaking on TV, is why his valuations have an evaluative character.

Now, the American Vampire League wishes to perpetuate the notion that we are just like you [...]

The adverb “now” establishes an opposition between what he has experienced during his life as a vampire (“nearly 3,000 years”) and what is going on at the moment: this is the first time something like this has ever happened. He presents the current situation by means of a negative valuation of the behavior of an institution (“the American Vampire League”), to which he attributes the modal values “astute” and “insincere”, and a feature of manipulation. The way it is phrased (“wishes to perpetuate the notion that”) contributes to distancing the speaker from what is being said: it is a view that he does not endorse.

[...] and I suppose in a few small ways we are. We’re narcissists. We care only about getting what we want, no matter what the cost, just like you.

Right after he has implied that he does not share the view that vampires and humans are equals, he makes a concession. This argumentative move, although marked with the modal value “unsure” (“I suppose”), is aimed at presenting his own views as rational (he has thought about this and seen both similarities and differences), and empathizing with his audience, to not alienate them (there is some common ground between them). But the similarities he lists, mainly selfishness, are considered flaws (or sins) by humans. His is an ambiguous valuation of the quality and behavior of a non-human (vampires), combined with a hierarchization of equality, and the fact that he does not assume a definitely negative axiological stance toward the object of his valuation tells the audience that what humans take as something to be avoided (at least in principle), poses no problem to vampires: they can be as selfish as humans, without the remorse.

Global warming, perpetual war, toxic waste, child labor, torture, genocide! That’s a small price to pay for your SUVs and your flat-screen TVs, your blood diamonds, your designer jeans, your absurd, garish McMansions! Futile symbols of permanence to quell your quivering, spineless souls.

The speaker’s axiological progression in this fragment is interesting. He begins by listing examples of human selfishness, maintaining his ambiguous axiological value, but a modal value of “anger” starts to emerge. He makes explicit his non-disapproving stance (“That’s a small price to pay”), but he does so with irony, so he is marked with the modal value “insincere”. By the end of his valuation (“your absurd, garish McMansions”), his negative axiological stance toward the behavior of humans has become better-defined, and the irony has disappeared. He ends this fragment by performing an explicit negative valuation, in the practical domain, of the quality of a physical object (“Futile symbols of permanence”), which refers to the mansions, but also to all human creations that can be equated to them in this sense. Stylistically, his utterance contains an alliteration of [k] and [s] (“to quell your quivering, spineless souls”), which speaks to the subject’s linguistic competence. This, combined with his lexical choices (“quell”, “quivering”, “garish”, “futile”), makes his speech almost literary. This is coherent with a common cultural image of vampires as highly cultivated beings, and it contributes to reinforcing his authority, as mastery of language is perceived to be a sign of high intelligence.

But No. In the end, we are *nothing* like you. We are ... immortal. Because we drink the *True Blood*, blood that is living, organic and human.

This fragment stands in opposition (“But no”) to the concession commented above. Although it is possible to identify some similarities between humans and vampires, these are trivial, according to the speaker. If above he was marked as “unsure” in his concession (“I suppose”), he now displays the modal value “sure” (“we are *nothing* like you”). His speech act here is a positive valuation of the quality of a non-human (“immortal”), which implies a negative valuation of the opposite quality in humans. His valuation also includes a hierarchization of superiority in favor of vampires, based on a predator–prey relationship (“because we drink [...] blood that is living, organic and human”).

And that is the truth the AVL wishes to conceal from you, because let’s face it, eating people is a tough sell these days. So they put on their friendly faces to pass their beloved VRA [Vampire Rights Amendment]. But make no mistake, mine is the true face of vampires!

Making use of the authority conferred to him mainly by his age and by the medium (TV), the speaker now goes back to an idea formulated early on in his intervention: the negative valuation of the behavior of an institution (“the AVL”), to which he attributes the modal value “disloyal” (“the AVL wishes to conceal”, “they put on friendly faces”). By doing this, and in so doing displaying the modal values “sure” and “sincere” (“that is the truth the AVL wishes to conceal from you”, “make no mistake, mine is the true face of vampires”), the speaker grants an (apparently) objective status to all his previous valuations and, in general, to all his previous assertions. Finally, his delegitimization of the AVL is accomplished, secondarily, by the irony in “eating people is a tough sell these days”, stylistically a *meiosis* or understatement. This device works to trivialize the AVL’s efforts at integration.

Why would we seek equal rights? You are not our equals! We will eat you, after we eat your children. Now time for the weather. Tiffany?

After establishing his superiority by several means, both as an individual and as a member of a group, the speaker appeals to the audience’s rationality in assessing the truth in the AVL’s claims, as well as the honesty of its behavior. This is an invitation to humans to accept the speaker’s arguments and to acknowledge their own inferiority vis-à-vis vampires. He ratifies his negative hierarchizing valuation (“you are not our equals”), and presents it as the conclusion that the audience should reach after listening to him. This conclusion follows deductively from the iterated use of the adjective “equal”. The hierarchization reflects the use of the conjunction–disjunction feature, for establishing an opposition between vampires and humans, and marking the lack of fulfillment, on the part of humans, of certain criteria, known to the speaker, for being considered equal to a vampire.

He then performs a commissive speech act (“we will eat you, after we eat your children”), which can be interpreted as both a threat and a promise, and which reaffirms the predator–prey relation between vampires and humans already presented above.

His final remark (“Now time for the weather. Tiffany?”) achieves a stylistic device called *bathos*, by which “unrelated elements are brought together as if they denoted things equal in rank or belonging to one class, as if they were of the same stylistic aspect” (Galperin, 1977/1987, p. 136). Here, the weight and force of the speaker’s previous speech acts is juxtaposed to the perceived triviality of the weather report. It has two main effects. First, it minimizes the speaker’s previous remarks (particularly his promise to “eat you, after we eat your children”), which only adds to the horror, because the audience’s perception will be that vampires are as upset by mass massacre as they are by the weather, that is, not at all. Secondly, by acknowledging the interest of humans in something as trivial as the weather, this remark parallels the speaker’s negative valuation, commented above, of human interest in “your SUVs and your flat-screen TVs, your blood diamonds, your designer jeans, your absurd, garish McMansions”.

As a macro-speech act, then, this intervention can be described as a negative hierarchizing valuation of inferiority, with humans as the valuated object. It implies, of course, a positive hierarchizing valuation of superiority in favor of vampires. The hierarchy is presented in terms of a predator-prey relationship.

In the case of Governor Truman Burrell, his intervention takes the form of a televised press conference, held after a radical faction of vampires sabotage Tru Blood factories, effectively ending Tru Blood supply in Louisiana. Desperate vampires have reacted by going back to hunting humans in the streets.

(6) Truman Burrell (Governor of Louisiana, in a press conference): “I swore an oath to serve and protect the people of this state. People, not vampires. (Crowd cheers) No, no, hold on, hold on, hold on. I’ve nothing against vampires as a species. When they made themselves known to us, this office, my family, the good people of Louisiana, we welcomed them with all the generosity, acceptance, and Southern hospitality this great state’s always been known for. (Crowd cheers) That’s why our vampire population is the largest in the country. And that is also why this *True Blood* shortage has hit us so very hard. Since the terrorist attacks on *True Blood* factories last week, 246 human Louisianans lost their lives. When human, tax-paying citizens can no longer walk on these streets at night without fearing for their lives, then we have to take our streets back! As of this moment, I’m instituting a state-wide vampire curfew. All vampires are to remain indoors or underground after sundown. Furthermore, I’m enforcing Executive Order 846 of the Louisiana State Constitution: we are closing down all vampire-run businesses. (Crowd cheers) That’s why I’m saying to all of you that have the financial and legal, *legal* means to do it, buy a gun. Buy as many as you can. Stock up on wood bullets. This is still America; you have the right to defend yourselves and the people you love!” (S06E01, 00:08:30)

We will proceed in the same manner as before, by dividing the intervention into smaller fragments for their individual analysis.

I swore an oath to serve and protect the people of this state. People, not vampires.

The first fragment of the speaker’s intervention is an assertive speech act that refers to a commissive one, performed in the past (“I swore an oath ...”), whereby the speaker acquired the modal value “committed”, exhibited now along with the modal value “determined”. But this assertion includes a valuation, specifically a positive appraisal, in the ethical domain, of the behavior of a human (himself). This behavior is characterized by the features of deprivation (“serve”) and control (“protect”). He refers to the recipient of this behavior as “the people of this state”, by which one could understand anyone who lives in Louisiana. However, he quickly specifies exactly who he has in mind: “People, not vampires”. This is a hierarchizing act of inferiority in detriment of vampires, based on the species they belong to, which makes the valuation fall within the physical-biological domain. The feature of conjunction-disjunction reflects how the speaker establishes an opposition between humans and vampires, and it marks the lack of fulfillment, on the part of vampires, of certain criteria (their biological condition, we infer) considered by the speaker as necessary for his commissive act, the modal value “committed”, and the features of control and deprivation, to refer to them.

(Crowd cheers) No, no, hold on, hold on, hold on. I’ve nothing against vampires as a species.

In view of his audience’s response, the speaker proceeds to explicitly place himself in the axiological square as a non-disapproving appraiser, in the ethical, ideological and physical-biological domains, of the quality of a non-human. To do this, he resorts to the cliché “I have nothing against X’s (in general)”, which is loaded with veiled discrimination. Furthermore, he specifies “as a species”, which directly contradicts the physical-biological opposition he established in “People, not vampires”. As a result, we are left (albeit temporarily) with a baseless exclusion of vampires: we have an object (non-human), but no property to focalize, seeing as it can no longer be its quality feature, because the

speaker has “nothing against vampires as a species”. This move creates a certain suspense in the audience, who are made to pay close attention to what follows, in hopes of finding a base to the opposition.

When they made themselves known to us, this office, my family, the good people of Louisiana, we welcomed them with all the generosity, acceptance, and Southern hospitality this great state’s always been known for. (Crowd cheers)

Instead of providing the absent base to the opposition established above, the speaker goes on to perform a positive (almost exalting) valuation of the behavior of humans, specifically “the good people of Louisiana”, who he is sworn to serve and protect. The focalized features are permission (“acceptance”), deprivation (“generosity”, “hospitality”), and conjunction–disjunction, which reflects here how this behavior coincides with what has traditionally been the case, thus meeting certain expectations about “the good people of Louisiana”. The message, once again, is clear: we did what was in our nature to do. In addition, a modal value of “regret” begins to emerge.

That’s why our vampire population is the largest in the country. And that is also why this Tru Blood shortage has hit us so very hard.

The speaker now presents two consequences of the behavior he so praised in the previous fragment, one good and one bad.

First, because the people of Louisiana are so welcoming, their “vampire population is the largest in the country”, and this is something to be proud of, as it reflects the inclusive, non-discriminatory nature of Louisianans. This speech act is thus a positive, singularizing hierarchization.

The second consequence of this behavior is a negative one, namely, the fact that Louisiana has suffered the consequences of the “Tru Blood shortage” more intensely than any other state with fewer vampires. We must bear in mind, however, that this is a human speaker who has already established a stark opposition between humans and vampires, and who is now addressing other humans, so the “us” in “has hit us so very hard” refers to humans. Thus, humans, and not vampires, are presented as victims of the blood shortage, but not just any victims: humans were too welcoming, too generous, and this is the result.

Both consequences, when combined into a single speech act, constitute an ambivalent valuation of the quality of a situation.

Since the terrorist attacks on Tru Blood factories last week, 246 human Louisianans lost their lives.

This fragment makes explicit the negative consequence commented above. It begins with a temporal marker (“since”), which has here a veiled causative meaning. The speaker does not commit to the causal link between the attacks and the deaths; all he does is establish a temporal succession, and lets the audience establish the causal link between the two. He furthermore describes the events as “terrorist attacks”, a term that constitutes a negative valuation of the behavior of non-humans, as well as an identifying categorization, a device typical of political discourse which reflects an ideological decision, given the political position of the speaker and of the group he belongs to (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 223). This official character of the term “terrorist attacks” is why this valuation has an evaluative character, and it falls within the ethical, ideological, and juridical domains.

The speaker describes the result of these “terrorist attacks” as “246 human Louisianans lost their lives”. Once again, humans are presented as victims of the Tru Blood shortage, and the losses are personal ones: we lost 246 of our own.

When human, tax-paying citizens can no longer walk on these streets at night without fearing for their lives, then we have to take our streets back!

This fragment expands on the theme of personal losses, and the situation is presented as intolerable: we cannot stand idly by as the lives of our own people, who do everything right (“human, tax-paying citizens”), are in danger. If we recall speech act [1], commented above, vampires too were presented as taxpaying citizens, so the only difference remains the species they belong to. This ratifies the physical–biological opposition negated above, but the way it is phrased suggests that the base for this opposition is not the *quality*, as it is evident, but the *behavior* of vampires. The whole fragment constitutes a negative ethical–psychological valuation of the quality of a situation, and the valuating subject is marked with the modal values “compelled”, “determined”, “outburst” and “anger”: we Louisianans are welcoming by nature, but we stand up for our own, and if the situation calls for it, as it does now, we will fight.

Moreover, the syntactic and semantic structures of the fragment mirror that of the beginning of the U.S. Declaration of Independence: “When in the course of human events ...” This contributes to the solemn and grandiose character of the speaker’s statement, and it adds to the effect in his audience.

As of this moment, I’m instituting a state-wide vampire curfew: all vampires are to remain indoors or underground after sundown. Furthermore, I’m enforcing Executive Order 846 of the Louisiana State Constitution: we are closing down all vampire-run businesses. (Crowd cheers)

This fragment is, by comparison, much simpler than the ones we have seen so far. It constitutes the logical climax of this intervention (as opposed to the emotional climax, which we will see below), so everything that came before has been building up to it. It is the first time that the speaker makes explicit use of his political status and authority as Governor of Louisiana, by performing two consecutive declarative speech acts (“I’m instituting ...”, “I’m enforcing ...”), each followed by an explanation.

That’s why I’m saying to all of you that have the financial and legal, *legal* means to do it, buy a gun. Buy as many as you can. Stock up on wooden bullets.

This fragment is, plainly stated, a call to arms. This is realized by means of a series of directive speech acts (“buy a gun”, “buy as many as you can”, “stock up on wooden bullets”), formulated as pieces of advice, not as orders, and prefaced by an insistence on the weapons to be acquired legally: the Governor cannot incite his constituency to illegality. This call to arms, combined with the curfew declared above, create a state of exception: humans are at war with vampires.

This is still America; you have the right to defend yourselves and the people you love!

The final fragment gives some details about this war; specifically, it is humans who are under attack, and the guns and bullets are meant to be defensive in purpose. This attenuates somewhat the call to arms performed above, but it does not cancel it. This fragment also presents the speaker as marked, once again, with the modal value “compelled”, which he attributes to his audience as well: we are under attack, so we *have* to defend ourselves.

In addition, this final fragment constitutes the emotional climax of the Governor’s intervention, an appeal to pathos, which has an immediate, more forceful effect on the audience than logical arguments, especially when saved for the very end. In this case, it is achieved by appealing to love and patriotism, and these positive emotions work to legitimize whatever negative feelings (or subsequent actions) the audience might have toward vampires: it is not bad if it is for a good reason.

The sentence “This is still America” is meant to reassure the audience in the knowledge that, even after everything that has happened, vampires have not succeeded in changing who we are: They have not changed us, we are still Us. The opposition, both physical–biological and ideological, between humans and vampires, elaborated throughout the series, is thus manifest in this fragment. Also noteworthy is the fact that “America” is defined as “having the right to”. Specifically, “the right to defend yourselves and the people you love” also contributes to the juridical legitimization of actions undertaken by humans against vampires: it is not bad if the law says I can do it, it is what makes us Americans, and that is good.

As a macro-speech act, this intervention can be described as a directive speech act, specifically persuasion, containing a positive valuation of the desired behavior, which is legitimized by appealing mainly to emotion, and of its agents (humans), and a negative valuation of the object this behavior should be directed at, namely, vampires.

4. Conclusions

The TV series *True Blood*, analyzed throughout this paper, uses vampires, and the discrimination against them by humans, to represent other minorities, such as homosexuals, black people, immigrants, and women, and the discriminatory treatment they are subjected to in today’s society.

It was possible to account for this allegorical use of vampires by establishing a distinction between the internal context of the story and the external context of the TV series. The similarities between them, the elements that are common to both, allow the viewer to interpret the events in the story as pertaining to, or mirroring, events in the world (s)he lives in.

Context analysis, based on this distinction, allowed us to predict what kinds of valuations we would find during the analysis and, insofar as these predictions fit the results, proved to be a valid analytical method for the purposes of this research.

Combining these elements (dimensional structure of meaning, context, discourse strategy, even some stylistic choices), we were able to identify the following 13 discursive patterns of discrimination in the TV series *True Blood*:

- establishing an opposition between Us and Them (or You), a device typical of political and, more broadly, ideological discourse;
- metonymical reference to the discriminated group, by focusing on the differentiating trait (here, “fangs” for vampires, but also “fang-bangers” for people who habitually engage in sexual intercourse with vampires);
- negative valuations in the physical–biological domain, often accompanied by hierarchizations of superiority or inferiority, always in detriment of the discriminated group;
- appealing generally to institutional authority, which can be based on religious, political or judicial power;
- specifically, appealing to the authority one has been conferred in performing negative, discriminatory valuations, with the goal of “disguising” one’s appraisals as evaluations;
- conversely, intentionally refraining from using whatever institutional, socially recognized authority one might possess in performing negative, discriminatory valuations, with the goal of “disguising” one’s evaluations as appraisals;
- openly exhibiting the modal value “sure”, derived from this institutional authority, in discriminatory speech acts;
- insisting on the ontological class the object belongs to (human or non-human), when it is different from the discriminating subject’s;
- negate the property of quality (defining and essential), and present instead the negative valuation as focused on another, non-defining property, mainly behavior, but also quantity or state;

- using the conjunction–disjunction feature to exclude the members of a group from a category, or to include them in a stereotype;
- presenting the group that is discriminated against as “aggressors”, and the discriminating group as “victims”;
- evaluative, identifying categorization of the discriminated group, using categories the negative character of which has been made institutional, such as “terrorist”; and
- using positive emotions (appealing to pathos) to legitimize discrimination.

Some of these patterns have been previously identified and widely discussed in the CDA literature. Others, however, are only fully understood when considered against the background of our theoretical framework. They have thus the advantage of making explicit reference to the theory of valuation and semantic modality.

The general character of these discursive patterns of discrimination supports the prediction that they will be identified in the analysis of other instances of discriminatory discourse, both fictional and factual.

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Appendix A

Sample from the corpus of speech acts gathered from the TV series *True Blood*

- (1) “GOD HATES FANGS” (Opening credits)
- (2) Nan Flanagan: “We are citizens, we pay taxes, we deserve basic civil rights just like everyone else.” (S01E01, 00:00:57)
- (3) TV Host (in response to speech act 2): “Doesn’t your race have a rather sordid history of exploiting and feeding off innocent people... for centuries?” (S01E01, 00:01:02)
- (4) Nan Flanagan (in response to speech act 3): “Doesn’t *your* race have a history of exploitation? We never owned slaves, Phil, or detonated nuclear weapons.” (S01E01, 00:01:17)
- (5) Bill Compton: “Vampires often turn on those who trust them, you know? We don’t have human values like you.” (S01E01, 00:26:10)
- (6) Sookie Stackhouse (in response to speech act 5): “Well, humans turn on those who trust them too.” (S01E01, 00:26:18)
- (7) Sookie Stackhouse: “Even if you hate vampires, you can’t let trash like the Rats go and drain them!” (S01E01, 00:36:24)
- (8) Jason Stackhouse (in response to speech act 7): “Who fucking cares?! He’s already dead.” (S01E01, 00:36:33)
- (9) Rev. Theodore Newlin (talking about vampires): “We never should have given them the vote and legitimize their unholy existence.” (S01E02, 00:19:30)
- (10) Rev. Theodore Newlin (talking about vampires): “Do you know how much money these monsters have given to politicians of both parties, as well as the corporate media?” (S01E02, 00:19:43)
- (11) Tara Thornton (upon learning Sookie had gone out with a vampire the night before): “Did he bite you? [Sookie answers No.] Are you sure? Because you know they can hypnotize you?” (S01E02, 00:21:38)
- (12) Sookie Stackhouse (in response to speech act 11): “Yeah, and black people are lazy and Jews have horns.” (S01E02, 00:21:42)
- (13) Mike Spencer (talking about the vampire Bill Compton): “He’s not a man.” (S01E02, 00:25:39)
- (14) Jason Stackhouse (talking to vampire Bill Compton): “A lot of Americans don’t think that you people deserve special rights.” (S01E02, 00:30:57)
- (15) Man in bar (thinking): “Dead fucks, niggers, and regular folk all living together. If God wanted it like this, He’d have made us look the same. It ain’t good. Maybe these really are the end times.” (S01E04, 00:17:27)
- (16) Sam Merlotte: “Vampires think of one thing and one thing only: drinking your blood.” (S01E04, 00:26:46)
- (17) Sookie Stackhouse (in response to speech act 16): “Frankly, Sam, I’m surprised at you. I thought we were *for* the Vampire Rights Amendment.” (S01E04, 00:27:00)
- (18) Sheriff Bud Dearborne (talking about vampire Bill Compton): “How the hell could she [file a missing persons report], Sookie, when the person that’s missing ain’t even a real person?” (S03E01, 00:27:53)
- (19) Sheriff Bud Dearborne: “I got dead bodies piling up on me, dead *human* bodies. I can’t be spending this department’s limited resources following hunches about vampire-nappings!” (S03E01, 00:28:26)
- (20) Sookie Stackhouse: “I love Bill just like you love your wife, and your children, and your grandbabies.” (S03E01, 00:28:36)
- (21) Debbie Pelt (to werewolf Alcide Herveaux, talking about Sookie): “You had a choice, and you picked a fucking fang-banger over one of your own?!” (S03E07, 00:08:23)

- (22) Russell Edgington: “You pathetic fool. Blindly doing the bidding of others, just like humans.” (S03E07, 00:42:54)
- (23) Russell Edgington: “We need to take this world back from the humans, not placate them with billboards and PR campaigns while they destroy it!” (S03E07, 00:45:22)
- (24) Eric Northman (talking about Sookie): “Like most humans, she’s ruled by petty emotions.” (S03E08, 00:07:52)
- (25) Eric Northman: “I believed my maker, Godric, was such a vampire [one strong enough to unite us all], but he was weak! He succumbed to his humanity, and it killed him!” (S03E08, 00:08:25)
- (26) Tara Thornton (to vampire Franklin Mott): “You don’t love anything. You can’t. Because you are a psychopath! You violated me and terrorized me because that’s what vampires do.” (S03E09, 00:51:44)
- (27) Russell Edgington (on TV): “Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Russel Edgington, and I have been a vampire for nearly 3,000 years. Now, the American Vampire League wishes to perpetuate the notion that we are just like you, and I suppose in a few small ways we are. We’re narcissists. We care only about getting what we want, no matter what the cost, just like you. Global warming, perpetual war, toxic waste, child labor, torture, genocide! That’s a small price to pay for your SUVs and your flat-screen TVs, your blood diamonds, your designer jeans, your absurd, garish McMansions! Futile symbols of permanence to quell your quivering, spineless souls. But No. In the end, we are nothing like you. We are... immortal. Because we drink the *True Blood*, blood that is living, organic and human. And that is the truth the AVL wishes to conceal from you, because let’s face it, eating people is a tough sell these days. So they put on their friendly faces to pass their beloved VRA [Vampire Rights Amendment]. But make no mistake, mine is the true face of vampires! Why would we seek equal rights? You are not our equals! We will eat you, after we eat your children. Now time for the weather. Tiffany?” (S03E09, 00:55:53)
- (28) Truman Burrell (Governor of Louisiana, in a press conference): “I swore an oath to serve and protect the people of this state. People, not vampires. (Crowd cheers) No, no, hold on, hold on, hold on. I’ve nothing against vampires as a species. When they made themselves known to us, this office, my family, the good people of Louisiana, we welcomed them with all the generosity, acceptance, and Southern hospitality this great state’s always been known for. (Crowd cheers) That’s why our vampire population is the largest in the country. And that is also why this *True Blood* shortage has hit us so very hard. Since the terrorist attacks on *True Blood* factories last week, 246 human Louisianans lost their lives. When human, tax-paying citizens can no longer walk on these streets at night without fearing for their lives, then we have to take our streets back! As of this moment, I’m instituting a state-wide vampire curfew. All vampires are to remain indoors or underground after sundown. Furthermore, I’m enforcing Executive Order 846 of the Louisiana State Constitution: we are closing down all vampire-run businesses. (Crowd cheers) That’s why I’m saying to all of you that have the financial and legal, *legal* means to do it, buy a gun. Buy as many as you can. Stock up on wooden bullets. This is still America, you have the right to defend yourselves and the people you love!” (S06E01, 00:08:30)



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