



## The enunciative mode in the comic "Miss Davis: The life and struggles of Angela Davis"

### O modo enunciativo nos quadrinhos "Miss Davis: A vida e as lutas de Angela Davis"

10.56238/isevmjv3n1-002

Receipt of originals: 11/12/2023

Publication acceptance: 12/29/2023

Vivianne Caldas de Souza Dantas<sup>1</sup>, Verônica Palmira Salme de Aragão<sup>2</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to analyze the enunciative mode of discourse, addressing the narrative, descriptive and argumentative modes, both in verbal and non-verbal elements. The present work refers to the analysis of the introductory chapter of the book "Miss Davis: THE LIFE AND STRUGGLES OF ANGELA DAVIS". The introduction to the work is entitled "Black Panther Party Headquarters, Oakland, 1969", in comic books, which are part of the program of the Black Panther party and feature the participation of Angela Davis in the party. The methodology of the research is bibliographic and qualitative, having as theoretical basis the Semiolinguistic Analysis of Discourse, by Patrick Charaudeau, the Modes of Discourse Organization and, as a basis for analysis, the Enunciative Mode of Discourse. The book is about a progressive struggle of the African American people for equal rights, and Angela Davis' participation is fundamental to black feminism in the USA. According to Foucault (2014), the action of the characters in the comics questions the sovereignty of truth, which is the concept of hierarchy of the white and cis man. In other words, when the Black Panthers group questions, it suspends the sovereignty of the discourse of the signifier (the police and the state).

**Keywords:** Enunciative mode of discourse, Semiolinguistic Analysis of Discourse, Angela Davis.

#### INTRODUCTION

"Miss Davis: The Life and Struggles of Angela Davis" consists of four chapters. The introduction to the work is entitled "Black Panther Party Headquarters, Oakland, 1969" and consists of images and statements that are part of the Black Panther Party program. The introductory chapter covers Angela Davis' participation in the Black Panther party, along with other women.

For an extended period, the Black Panther group was occupied only by black men. Subsequently, due to the growing militancy of black feminism and the increase in female participation each, the Black Panther party made room for the inclusion of black women. This

---

<sup>1</sup> Master's student at the State University of Rio Grande do Norte, UERN

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Professor at the State University of Rio Grande do Norte, UERN



change has resulted in a significant amount of women engaged in the fight for their rights. As a major party, women's participation in the Black Panthers was central to the American black feminist movement, with the participation of one of the most important feminists, Angela Davis.

The introductory chapter enunciates the struggle of the African American people for equal rights. The peoples of the southern states, mostly black men and women, lived in situations of misery, fear and terror. In addition to the vulnerable living circumstances, there were the bombings by the police and the right-wing extremist terrorist group Ku Klux Klan, who murdered African Americans under the discourse of white supremacy. Racism, in addition to affecting people's skin color and phenotypic traits, also influences their place and social class.

In view of the above, the objective of this work is to analyze the enunciative mode based on the relationship between the verbal and the non-verbal, in the introductory chapter "Black Panther Party Headquarters, Oakland, 1969", of the work "Miss Davis". The manifestation of the characters in the comics is based on the experiences of black people in the USA and represents a way of reacting against police attacks. The specific objectives of this work are: a) to investigate the different enunciators present in the verbal and non-verbal spheres of the enunciative scene, taking into account the situation and the context; and b) analyze the statements, considering the discursive components of the communicative situation, such as identity characteristics of the participants and contractual elements.

The discourse of the Black Panthers group is fundamental for urgent social changes, as well as the power of representativeness that the discourses open up for a new discourse that, according to Chomsky (2014, p. 42), "as conditions change, a certain human intelligence will advance to new forms of creation", that is, improving the lives of African American peoples. The statements will be analyzed based on Patrick Charaudeau (2019)'s theory, in the modes of organization of the enunciative discourse which, according to the author, has a "basic function", intervening in other modes of organization such as the descriptive, the narrative and the argumentative.

Based on the modes of organization of the enunciative discourse, we will first address what happens in the introductory chapter to understand the identities of the characters and their discursive bias. In the enunciative mode, the focus is on the speech subjects, and from the action of these speech subjects, it is possible to understand and analyze the constitution of the discourse. In the discourses of the characters, there is a clear purpose (freedom and equity of rights of African American peoples), and it is essential to understand "the position that the speaking subject occupies *in relation to the interlocutor*, in relation to what he says and in



relation to what the other says" (CHARAUDEAU, 2019, p. 82).

On the other hand, the speaker and the understander never remain in their own world, in the world of contacts; They address each other, they enter into active dialogical relationships. Understanding is always pregnant with the answer.

In the speaker's word there is always an element of appeal to the listener, a guideline aimed at his or her response (BAKTHIN, 2016, p. 113).

The frequent violent and racist attacks directed at blacks led the group to arm itself against the racist American police. Huey Newton, one of the founders of the party, fought for the right of defense of blacks, arming the black population against the racist attacks they suffered in the United States. The first chapter deals with a constant struggle of black people for better lives, decent employment, an end to the exploitation of whites against blacks, access to education and health for all, and the fight against police brutality.

Thus, the present work consists of an investigation, within the Semiolinguistic Analysis of Discourse, in the Enunciative Mode of Discourse, of the different enunciators present in the comic strips, taking into account the situation, the context and the historicity of blacks at the time of the segregation regime. The utterances will be analyzed considering the components of the enunciative mode of discourse, which encompass the identity characteristics of the partners and the contracts established. In the modes of discourse organization, there are three functions: allocutive, elocutive, and delocutive. Below, we'll further explain the function of each:

In the ALLOCUTIVE mode, there is an interaction between the speaking subject and the interlocutor. The speaking subject expects his message to reach the interlocutor through a point of view. The interlocutor acts on the speaker's speech, and may or may not agree with his point of view, thus establishing a relationship of influence. In the ELOCUTIVE mode, the speaking subject enunciates what he thinks about a given fact without the intervention of an interlocutor. The point of view occurs on the basis of what the subject knows or knows about a given fact or situation, containing a motive, a judgment, or a knowledge of a purpose. In the DELOCUTIVE mode, the subject's discourse does not imply the interlocutor. The speaking subject imposes himself on the discourse of a third party, without modifying or altering the discourse about the world. It is an external point of view, the vision of the other, in which the enunciative purpose "imposes itself" (CHARAUDEAU, 2019, p. 83).

These three functions of the Enunciative Mode involve linguistic procedures called modal categories, which help in the analysis and behavior of the speech subjects and the interlocutors in the action of the utterances. In these categories of analysis, it is possible to examine the role of



the speaker and the interlocutor in comics.

Therefore, this work is fundamental for discourse studies and has relevance in the academic area, given the need for anti-racist discourses for the permanence and advancement of black men and women in all spaces of society. This is a research work that will contribute to the conclusion of the Master's Degree in Language Sciences, in which four other chapters of the book will be analyzed.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present research consists of a bibliographic analysis of the book "Miss Davis: The Life and Struggles of Angela Davis", which narrates the history of the anti-racist struggle of African American peoples. This work is of great importance in the context of anti-racist struggles, which are so urgent and emerging in contemporary societies. Racism is not only a racial crime in the Americas, but worldwide.

The research is bibliographic in nature, since it involves an analysis of the work based on the theory of Patrick Charaudeau (2019), specifically the Semiolinguistic Analysis of Discourse. It is qualitative, addressing social and racial issues related to African-American people and communities, such as the Black Panther Party. In addition, it is quantitative, since it involves the analysis of six comic books (comics) referring to the racist situations faced by the group.

Comics are analyzed based on the general and specific objectives of the work. The choice of comics is based on the participation of Angela Davis in this medium. Angela Davis' contribution is crucial to the expansion of black feminism in the U.S. In this way, the enunciative scenes in which the character appears perform the function of understanding the situation and the context of race, gender and class.

The performance of the character Angela Davis constitutes a communicative situation with the other characters, allowing a deeper understanding of the struggles and identity characteristics of each participant. This takes into account their demands, concerns and speeches in favor of rights and quality of life.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Angela Davis's participation in the Black Panthers group was essential for the international dissemination of what was happening to African Americans. As a political connoisseur and university professor, the activist transcended the perspectives of African-American women, being a significant influence on the anti-racist struggle in the U.S. and on

contemporary black feminism.

The image in Figure 1 depicts a man from the Black Panthers group asking someone to call Angela Davis so she can notify the press. At the time, a police raid was taking place against the headquarters of the Black Panther group at 4:30 a.m. The phrase "**CALL ANGELA!**" is in bold, indicating the expression of anger in both the character's speech and facial expression, which suggests an incisive order.

Figure 1 – Image 1 (p. 13): Oakland 1969



Cast Iron: Cross (2020)

The communicative act in the comic indicates that the speaker acts, imposing an order on someone and establishing communication. This communication, as an enunciative act, is elocutive, as it allows the speaker to impose an order without the need for intervention by others. The "**CALL ANGELA**" generates an action of the speaker on the interlocutor, even if the interlocutor (not present in the comic) does not participate directly in that order.

The "world to signify" already exists. Angela Davis's participation and speech create the "world to signify." What the speaker is doing in the comic is an action of this "world to signify", through a process of transaction. In other words, Angela Davis initiates the process of transformation within the world she has created through her discourses and struggles, and the subjects who participate in the same community produce this action, forming a kind of circle that produces meaning.

In elocutive mode, the character made a decision: "Call Angela," expressing a want. In the narrative mode, there is an actant who acts, producing a will in the face of a situation, which is the police invasion of the headquarters of the Black Panther group. In this discourse of the actant, a narrative process occurs in which the subject's action generates an action through a functional orientation: "Call Angela", uniting for an action with the interlocutor without modifying the speaker's desire.

Angela becomes one of the biggest activists within the Black Panther group. Their participation is necessary and represents a threat to the state. Peaches calls Angela to inform her about what's going on at Black Panther Party headquarters. The party and the African-American people need Angela's presence at party headquarters as a form of denunciation and a threat to the racist and genocidal state.

Figure 2 – Image 2 (p. 16): Angela receives the call from Peaches



Cast Iron: Cross (2020)

It is understood that the verbal language present in the character's comic indicates fear with the exclamation "**OH, NO!**", evidenced by the use of capital letters that indicate a loud voice. The balloon splash shows that Angela is nervous and scared. Peaches' balloon also demonstrates that Angela's friend speaks loudly, exclaims, and gives an order: "**COME QUICKLY.**" The text matches the image. Angela's expression in the text, of fear and dread, is confirmed by the gesture depicted in the image.

In the communicative contract, there is the enunciative subject, Peaches, and the subject-addressee, Angela Davis. There is a communication between the subjects in the action. This communicative act is intrinsically linked to the reality of the two characters – the racism of the State and the anti-racism of the characters. This action produces a meaning-making filter, since



the two interact on the same subject within a social circle in which their concerns are the same: the struggle against black genocide and the domination of the racist state.

There is a narrative sequence between the first image, which says "**CALL ANGELA**", and the second image, which states "**COME QUICKLY, BEFORE EVERYONE IS KILLED!**". Both indicate an order between the characters, in which Angela's presence at that moment is a necessary and crucial order to resolve the police invasion against the Black Panther headquarters.

The enunciative mode present in the comic is the allocutive: the subject-enunciator, through the *actional* point of view – he produces an action – imposes a behavior on the subject-addressee, Angela Davis. From the moment Peaches says "**COME QUICKLY**", the character establishes an action to be taken. From an allocutive point of view, it is an injunction.

In the comic, there is also an interpellation: the subject-enunciative takes the form of a human identity, since in reality it existed, and expects Angela to react within what she has planned. In other words, Peaches wants Angela to go quickly to the party headquarters, and what she expects is for Angela to go. Davis's role is to recognize himself as the target of Peaches' plea: to save African-Americans who are in the crosshairs of the police.

In narrative mode, the two characters are actants who act: one produces an order and the other an action. Thus, the two actants act in opposition to the situation they are experiencing: racism and black genocide. The action of the characters starts from an argument of image one: "She's going to warn the press."

In the argumentative mode, it is called *a passing assertion*; There are two arguments:

Table 1 – Argumentative mode

Argument A – Image 1	Argument B – Image 2
"CALL ANGELA! SHE WILL WARN THE PRESS."	"COME QUICKLY, BEFORE YOU ALL BE KILLED!"

Source: Own authorship

In these two arguments, there is a clear consequence: Angela's presence is strong in the anti-racist struggle. Angela possesses the discursive power to speak directly to the press; A black woman, in the sixties, holds significant media power. In addition, she has the power to stop the police from killing African-American men and women who were at the party's headquarters.

Figure 3 – Image 3 and 4 (p.22): Intimidation suffered by Angela Davis by journalists



Cast Iron: Cross (2020)

Angela is intimidated by journalists. With the strong strength and influence that the activist possesses, journalists try, at any cost, to distort the discourse of the university professor. Davis was a rarity among African-American women: she went overseas, graduated outside the U.S., returned to fight with the Black Panthers, and became a college professor.

Angela's life drew attention to and influenced black women, while at the same time causing concern to the state, the police and the media. Any attitude by Angela in answering the journalist's question could trigger a violent action by the state against her and on the anti-racist movement as a whole. In the comics, there is a space-time situation that involves the history of the Black Panther movement in the sixties and seventies, as well as the media action on the anti-racist movement.

In this space-time, one can perceive the gestures of the characters:

Chart 2 – Character action

Character Action 1 – Journalist	Character Action 2 – Angela Davis
<p>The journalist tries to incriminate Angela Davis: "DID YOU KNOW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN?" In</p> <p>In the comic, the press is screaming at Angela, a black woman, studied and recognized among other black women.</p> <p>The press is looking for a culprit for the invasion, and the question to Angela shows that the journalist wants to find a reason in Angela for her to be hacked.</p> <p>The police raided and destroyed the party headquarters.</p>	<p>Angela describes the action of the police and is surrounded by African-American women.</p> <p>Angela's feminist presence is strong against media racism and the gender issue. The presence of these women, together with Angela, demonstrates the strength and influence of black women in the anti-racist and anti-sexist struggle.</p>

Source: Own authorship

The communicative contract takes place between the journalist and Angela Davis. In the discursive process, the journalist uses the discourse for a new discourse, which goes against what Angela has created in the "world to signify". Angela speaks an anti-racist discourse, of racial inequality, while the journalist creates a discourse on top of Angela's discourse, being an opposition, an accusation.

In the enunciation, the discourse constructed in the communicative contract between the journalist and Angela Davis becomes a relationship of force, called allocutive. The journalist acts through a discursive hierarchy: when he asks, he also accuses. He imposes an action on Angela, i.e., "DID YOU KNOW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN?" This journalist's question generates two arguments: the racist and the anti-racist.

Table 3 – Arguments of the journalist and Angela Davis

Argument 1 – Journalist	Argumento 2 – Angela Davis
<p>"DID YOU KNOW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN?"</p> <p>The journalist's question, as well as his facial physiognomy, leads to an accusation. Even if it is formulated as a question, in the enunciation, he expresses a judgment by postulating that Angela is responsible for this act.</p>	<p>"HOW COULD I HAVE KNOWN THAT THE POLICE WERE GOING TO RAID THE BLACK PANTHER HEADQUARTERS AT 4:30 A.M.? THEY WEREN'T GOING TO ANNOUNCE THAT KIND OF THING."</p> <p>Angela describes the police action on the Black Panther headquarters. In descriptive mode, it creates a subjective construction of the world by describing the action of the police, the place and the time.</p>

Source: Own authorship

In the narrative, the actant who acts is the journalist, while the actant who suffers the action is Angela Davis. Angela discourses a narrative of racial inequality, logically structuring what she wants to convey. The activist is accused by the journalist, but she reverses the accusation into a narrative describing the facts. In other words, the character has one goal: to denounce the state and the police. How does she do it? Using the discourse of the press against itself. At the same time that she responds, she denounces and accuses.

Table 4 – Roles of the journalist and Angela Davis

Journalist	Angela Davis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actante que age</li> <li>• Aggressor</li> <li>• Acts voluntarily and directly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actant Undergoing Action</li> <li>• Victim</li> <li>• Take action against the aggressor</li> </ul>

Source: Own authorship

Images 5 and 6 will be analyzed together to understand the communicative contract between the two comics. Angela Davis manages to contain the police invasion and the

oppression of the press. In the face of the black genocide experienced in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s, a police raid ending with no African-American men killed "IS ALREADY A VICTORY," as Angela Davis says.

Figure 4 – Image 5 (p. 24): African Americans attacked by police in the Black Panther party are alive



Cast Iron: Cross (2020)

In these two comics, there are two characters: the member of the Black Panther group and Angela Davis. The text in both comics matches the image of relief. The faces of the characters do not represent fear, nor aggressiveness, nor joy, nor revolt, but relief.

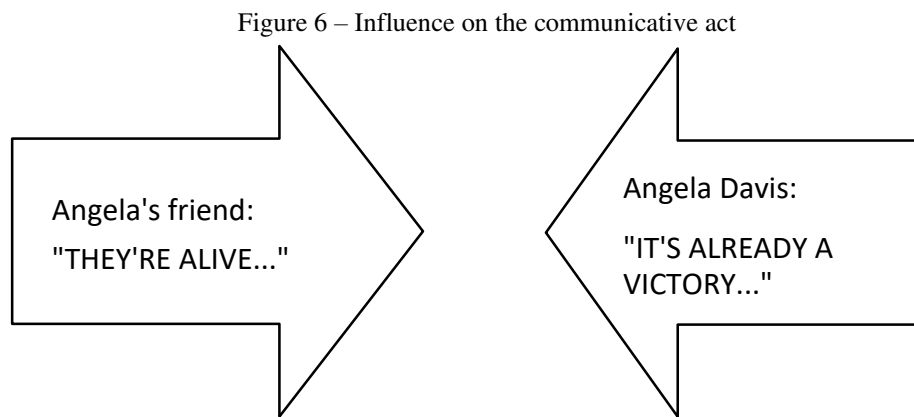
Figure 5 – Image 6 (p.25): It's already a victory



Cast Iron: Cross (2020)

In the communicative contract present in the comics, the subjects dialogue about the same subject and both agree with the enunciated discourse. The subject-enunciator is Angela's friend, and the subject-addressee is Angela Davis. Both coincide in their opinions with the experiences and struggles they have faced against the racist state. In this process and discursive circle, the characters add up their speeches of relief for their friends being alive and for winning this battle with everyone still alive.

In this communicative contract, Angela Davis's "world to signify" undergoes a transition to the world signified with her friend. In this communicative act, there is a relationship of influence that proceeds as follows:



There is a concordance between the discourse of the characters. The first character's speech interacts with Angela Davis's speech. This relationship of influence between the characters produces an interpellation, that is, Davis's friend expects her to react by corresponding to the identification of the facts: "THEY ARE ALIVE" and "IT'S ALREADY A VICTORY". The use of the upper case indicates that they are speaking loudly, as a form of struggle, of action and continuity in the struggle. "IT'S ALREADY A WIN" means they're on the right track.

In the narrative of the subjects, actants act. They narrate a situation of finality, how the facts turned out. In argumentative mode, it starts from two arguments: consequence and purpose.

Table 4 – Consequence and purpose

Consequence	Purpose
"THEY'RE ALIVE..." The consequence of Angela Davis's participation in confronting the press and controlling the police invasion was that everyone who was at the headquarters, they were still alive.	"IT'S ALREADY A VICTORY..." Davis' commemoration says his speech has sparked unrest in the press, the police and the state.

Source: Own authorship



## CONCLUSION

The present work is based on the Semiolinguistic Analysis of Discourse, focusing on the enunciative mode of discourse, to investigate the different enunciators present in the comic strips. The situation, context and historicity of the time of the segregation regime are considered. The analysis addresses an anti-racist struggle for equal rights and quality of life for African-American peoples.

It is important to emphasize the fundamental participation of Angela Davis in the struggle for the rights of African American peoples. The activist's contribution is relevant in the conquests of rights related to race, class and gender, as well as in the insertion of African Americans in spaces of power.

Since in the 1960s and 1970s the U.S. was still under a regime of segregation, especially in the southern states, the participation of a black woman, a university professor, is crucial to the construction of Angela Davis's black feminist movement. According to Foucault (2014), the action of the characters in comics challenges the sovereignty of truth associated with the concept of hierarchy of the white and cisgender man. In other words, when the Black Panthers group questions, it suspends the sovereignty of the discourse of the signifier (the police and the state).

Therefore, the present work is significant in the struggle for the rights to life and dignity of the peoples who, every year, have been wronged and had their histories erased. The discourse represents a relevant process of struggle for power and for the breaking of a white, heteronormative and patriarchal social hierarchy that still persists in societies.



## REFERENCES

Bakhtin, M. (2016). Os gêneros do discurso. São Paulo: Editora 34.

Charaudeau, P. (2019). Modos de Organização do Discurso. São Paulo: Contexto.

Chomsky, N. (2014). Natureza Humana: Justiça vs. Poder. São Paulo: Editora WMF Martins Fontes.

Croix, S. T. de La. (2020). Miss Davis: a vida e as lutas de Angela Davis. Rio de Janeiro: Agir.

Fiorin, J. L. (2018). Elementos de Análise do Discurso. São Paulo: Contexto.