

The Use of Diminutives in the Speech of the Brazilian Drag Queen Rita Von Hunty

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Introduction

- The research explores how multiple sociolinguistic variables contribute to **style** and **personae construction** in the performance of the Brazilian **drag queen** Rita Von Hunty
- **Diminutives**
- /t, d/ before [i]
- Onset and coda /r/



Rita Von Hunty (photo: Kaique Telles)

Style and Linguistic Variation

Eckert (2018); Hall-Lew, Moore & Podesva (2021); Irvine (2001)

- **Linguistic variation** is a resource for taking **stances**, making social moves, and constructing **identities** in situated **social practices**
- Linguistic variants acquire **social meaning** through **interaction** and as components of **styles**
- **Style** is understood as a **system of distinction**, in which linguistic forms and their social meanings emerge through contrast with available alternatives

Performativity and Performance

- Linguistic variation: performative and indexical (D'Onofrio & Eckert 2021: 32)
- Performativity beyond language → performance of gendered acts (Butler (2003 [1990], 2022 [2004], 2024)
- Study of gender brings the challenge to uncover the process of construction long thought as natural (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2013: 9)
- Performance as a special mode of situated communicative practice (Bell & Gibson 2011; Bauman 2011)
 - ▶ Staged
 - ▶ Act of stance-taking
 - ▶ Self-aware
 - ▶ At times hyperbolic

Drag Queens

Baker (1995); Butler (2003 [1990]); Felitti (2021); Nicas (2024); Quinalha (2021); Szymánka (2020); Trevisan (2018)

- The drag art “plays” with conventional understandings and perceptions of gender
- Drag has long combined entertainment, artistic expression, and political activism
- Drag culture has combined nightlife, political activism, and public education
- Today, drag is also a digital phenomenon, reaching audiences far beyond queer spaces



Examples of drag queens

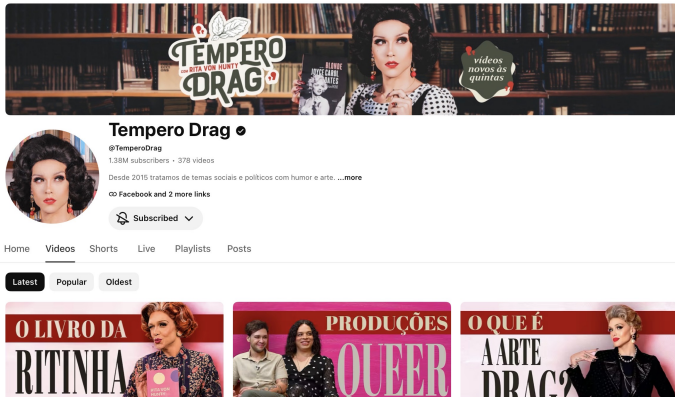
Rita Von Hunty

- **Rita Von Hunty** is the drag queen by the Brazilian artist and educator Guilherme Terreri
- She is the progressive digital influencer with the **largest number of subscribers/followers** in Brazil (Cunha Filho 2023)
- She is a **middle-aged** woman who was once Getúlio Vargas's typist, served as João Goulart's **Minister of Subversive Affairs**, and has taken part in the **Soviet revolutionary movement**



The YouTube Channel: Tempero Drag

- +1.38 million subscribers; 378; videos; and +78 million views.



"Since 2015, talking about social and political issues through humor and art. We believe education is a tool for emancipation, and we work together to promote broader and more equitable access to knowledge. Come and have a taste of our Tempero Drag."

Methodology

Corpus

- Digital ethnography (Georgakopoulou 2006) of the *Tempero Drag* YouTube channel
- Systematic observation and categorization of the channel's five main video formats:
 - ▶ “Pedagogical”
 - ▶ “Mulheres F*da”
 - ▶ “Recipe”
 - ▶ “Play”
 - ▶ “Interview”
- 100 videos (2015–2024) collected so that the corpus reflects the distribution of video formats on the channel

Data processing and analysis

- Transcription and annotation in ELAN (Sloetjes & Wittenburg 2008)
- Custom R scripts for coding and data extraction (R Core Team 2026)
- Quantitative-qualitative analysis of stylistic variation

Diminutives in Brazilian Portuguese

- In Brazilian Portuguese, diminutive meaning is most productively expressed through a morphological strategy (Bisol 2010)
- The diminutive is formed by adding the **suffixes -inh** or **-zinh** to the lexical base, followed by the thematic vowel (TV):

(1) menina →menin-inh-a
 girl girl-DIM-TV
 'little girl'

(2) amor → amor-zinh-o
 love love-DIM-TV
 'little love' ($\approx$ 'darling')

Diminutives and Their Pragmatic Dimension

Reynoso (2005); Cruz (2024)

- Diminutives are a pragmatic phenomenon, expressing at least two dimensions: quantitative (objects dimensions), and qualitative (speakers' perceptions on the object):

	Macro-functions	Sub-functions
+ Objective	Quantifying	Minimizing force Diminishing force Intensifying force
	Qualifying	Positive evaluation Negative evaluation
+ Subjective	Relational	Attenuation Irony Respect

Adapted from Cruz (2024)

Diminutives, Gender and Sexuality

- Mendes (2007, 2011): Perceptions of speakers from São Paulo (Brazil) about linguistic features and gender/sexuality;
- Mendes (2012): Analysis of diminutive frequency in sociolinguistic interviews:
 - ▶ Diminutive frequency follows a continuum, from heterosexual men to heterosexual women and more feminine gay men
 - ▶ Diminutives are interpreted as indexing femininity

Group	Per 1,000 words
Heterosexual men	0.28
Gay men (more masculine)	0.79
Heterosexual women	2.97
Gay men (more feminine)	3.59

Adapted from Mendes (2012)

Diminutives in Rita Von Hunty's Videos

- (3) Hello, my politically engaged **friend-DIM**.

Olá, amiguinho politizado.

- (4) ..we talk a **bit-DIM** about Capital, about **Mr. Karl-DIM**... value, price, goods, etc. To kickstart, I'll bring **Mr. Karl-DIM**, who was still very young at the time, a heartthrob.

a gente vai falar um **pouquinho** do Capital, do seu **Karlinho**... valor, preço, mercadoria, etc. Pra dar o kickstart, eu vou chamar aqui o seu **Karlinho**, que ele ainda é muito jovem nessa época, um galã.

- (5) [He] publishes his **book-DIM** called *The Five Love Languages*. I say "**book-DIM**" because it's **small-DIM**, ok?

Publica o seu livrinho chamado As Cinco Linguagens do Amor. Eu digo "livrinho" porque ele é pequenininho, tá?

- (6) What a **silly-DIM** extremism. "Bolsonaro and Lula are the **same-DIM**." Yeah... this one here, **Lula-DIM** made [Brazil] the world's sixth-largest economy...

Ai que extremismo bobinho. "Bolsonaro e Lula iguaizinhos." É... esse aqui, o Lulinha fez ser a sexta maior economia do mundo...

- (7) And then I go back to Simone de Beauvoir, to *The Second Sex*. I studied this work quite a **bit-DIM**.

E aí eu volto no Simone de Beauvoir, no O Segundo Sexo... eu estudei essa obra um tanto bastantinho.

- (8) That's all. A **kiss-DIM**. If I'm not punished for this horrendous blasphemy called critical thinking, see you next week, ok? A **kiss-DIM**. And do not obey any authority. Bye!

É isso. Um beijinho. Se eu não for punida por essa blasfêmia horrorosa que chama pensamento contestador, vejo vocês semana que vem, tá? Um beijinho. E não obedçam nenhuma autoridade. Tchau!

Diminutives in Rita Von Hunty's Videos

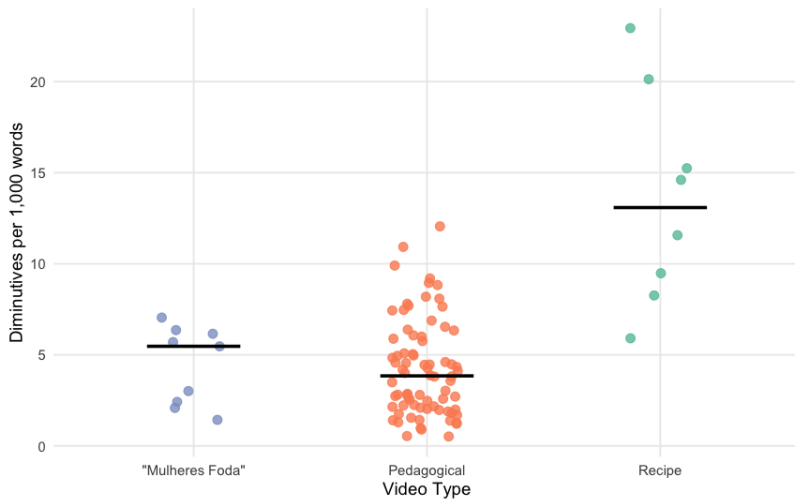
- 94 videos (2017-2024)
 - ▶ 76 “Pedagogical”
 - ▶ 9 “Recipe”
 - ▶ 8 “Mulheres F*da”
- Among the objective (“Size-related”) and subjective (“Metaphorical”) diminutives, were identified **869** occurrences

Table 1: Distribution of diminutives in Rita Von Hunty's videos (2017-2024)

Diminutives		Corpus (words)	Frequency (per 1,000 words)
Metaphorical	735	191,006	4.55
Size-related	134		

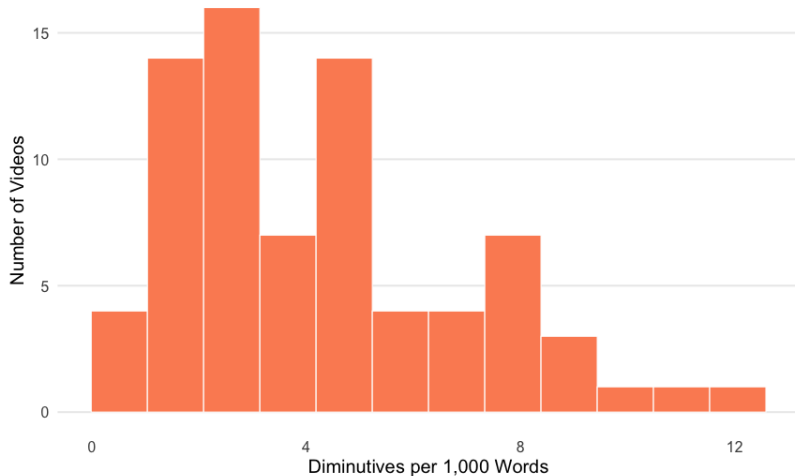
Diminutives in Rita Von Hunty's Videos

Frequency of diminutives (per 1,000 words) across three Tempero Drag video types



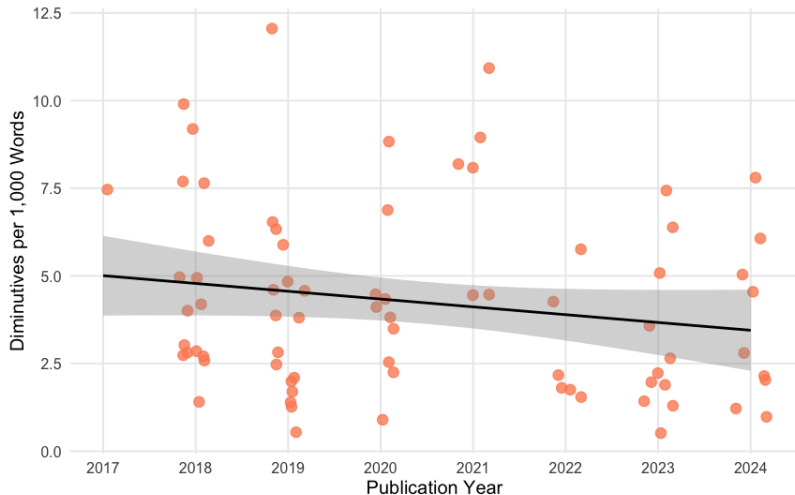
Diminutives in Rita Von Hunty's Videos

Distribution of diminutive frequency (per 1,000 words) in '**Pedagogical**' videos



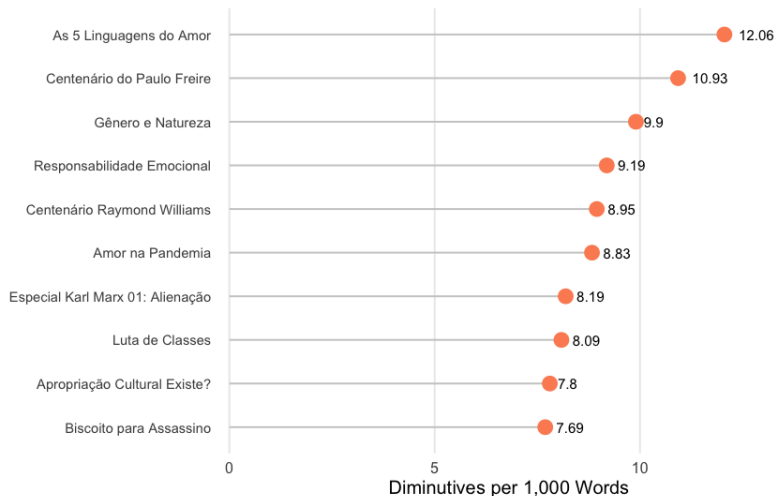
Diminutives in Rita Von Hunty's Videos

Distribution of diminutive frequency (per 1,000 words) in '**Pedagogical**' videos by publication year



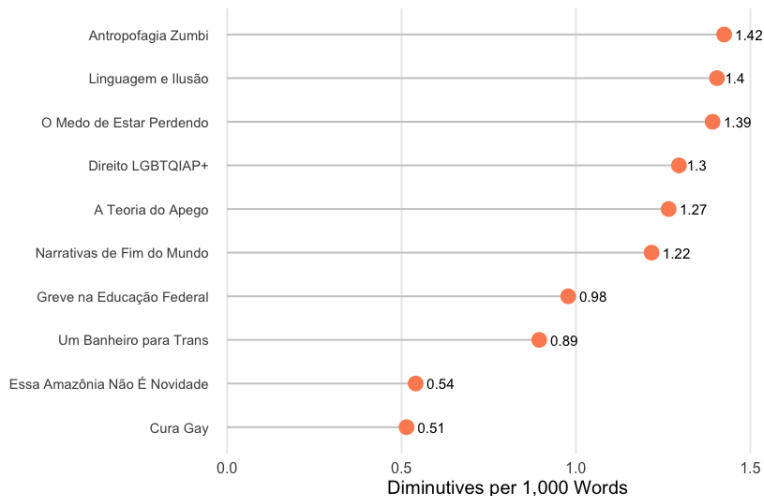
Diminutives in Rita Von Hunty's Videos

'Pedagogical' videos with the **highest** diminutive frequencies (per 1,000 words)



Diminutives in Rita Von Hunty's Videos

'Pedagogical' videos with the **lowest** diminutive frequencies (per 1,000 words)



Discussion and Conclusion

- Diminutives constitute a recurrent stylistic resource throughout Rita's performance on YouTube;
- Frequency is considerably higher than that reported for vernacular Brazilian Portuguese (Mendes 2012), suggesting a stylized and hyperbolic use;
- Their distribution across video types and topics might suggest that diminutives contribute to the construction of different performative personae (*camp culture*, *"feminine" dirty humor* → *educator deeply connected to her study*).



Rita Von Hunty, Paulo Freire and Simone de Beauvoir

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Thank you!

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Rita Von Hunty (with English Subtitles) - YouTube