

# CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DISCOURSE OF THE PEACE AGREEMENT IN COLOMBIA

**Camila Cajiao, Universidad Santiago de Cali, Universidad del Pacífico  
Juan Fernando León, Universidad Santiago de Cali, Fundación Universitaria  
de Popayán**

**Edward Javier Ordoñez, Universidad Santiago de Cali**

## ABSTRACT

*The article makes a critical analysis of the discourse on the changes that were made in the numerals of the peace agreement on the victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. The peace process between the government and the FARC-EP left the creation and establishment of an Agreement that announced the dissolution of the armed group and a series of political and legal commitments by the State; however, the political conjunctures were adverse to this end. This critical analysis of the discourse showed the existence of linguistic vacuum and pragmatic and semantic errors around its content, thus finding a distorted message. This may be one of the reasons why the Peace Agreement is currently affected.*

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Peace Agreement, Pragmatics, Semantics, Communicative Intention

## INTRODUCTION

The internal armed conflict in Colombia has been an event for more than 60 years that affected a large part of the Colombian population. In it, clashes between government forces and illegal groups led to a series of normative violations of International Humanitarian Law. In this regard, the prospect of a Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and one of the country's armed groups, in this case with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP), raised great hopes and challenges around the cessation of the armed conflict. Given the relevance of the issue, in recent years and current circumstances in Colombia, it is pertinent to reflect on it. Thus, the objective of this study is the critical analysis of the discourse in the changes given in the numerals on victims of the conflict of the versions of the Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace signed in Colombia.

Thus, the substance of the article is summarized in three points: First, in the need to know the changes that were made in the first version of the Peace Agreement, whose modifications were made after the results of the plebiscite. Second, to determine whether from a linguistic point of view the content that was used is coherent and clear for all recipients of the message. And third, to verify if the provisions can guarantee compliance and durability. It should be noted that the article seeks, first, to critically analyze the discourse in the changes that were made in the numerals on the victims of the conflict; and second, to address the decoding of semantic keys and the identification of the pragmatic communicative intention of the text.

### **Context: The Conflict and a Path Towards the Peace Agreement**

The violent scenes in Colombia do not represent a new theme throughout its history. Moncayo (2015), indicates:

During the 19th century, Colombia experienced eight general civil wars, fourteen local and two wars with Ecuador, and already in the 20th century it had the war with Peru, numerous urban and rural popular uprisings, the bipartisan violence of the 1940s and 1950s, and the

contemporary one that links in a complex way the guerrilla organizations, the paramilitaries, the cartels and groups of the narcotics economy. (p. 14)

Although the beginnings of the internal armed conflict date back to 1948, several authors agree that the time known as 'La Violencia' began between 1946 and 1950 (Cartagena, 2016; Grasa, 2019; Zuleta, 2006). The violence originates from political issues prior to that date, where bipartisanship prevailed with the liberal and conservative parties, later passing through the government of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, the pact for the National Front, and, of course, the appearance of groups outside the law (Garzón & Agudelo, 2019; Meger & Sachseder, 2020; Melamed, 2018). It could be inferred that, in these more than 60 years of conflict, the main purpose of violence is to obtain power.

The violence, the social crisis, and all the implications that the war brings were creating the urgency that different actors and governments, to establish peace agreements or talks with different armed groups for a partial cessation of this violence (Guzmán & Holá, 2019). An example of this is the dissolution of the guerrilla organization Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19) in 1990 with the agreement signed between the group and the government of President Virgilio Barco (1986-1990). But this fact and other approaches were not enough to end a conflict, even more so when other groups existed, including the FARC-EP.

The trajectory of the FARC-EP began in the early 1970s as a group against government policies and the strong influence of the United States worldwide, taking as a basis the events of the time "the Cuban revolution, the confrontation Sino-Soviet, and the Marxist debate around the models and strategies to make the revolution" (National Center for Historical Memory, 2014). It is also specified that several internal crises led the group to sustain itself "with forced contributions from landowners and kidnappings" (National Center for Historical Memory, 2014), in addition to drug production<sup>1</sup>. Over time, the FARC-EP took control over that population in a rural area where the Colombian state was absent, a social, military, economic and even judicial control (Graser et al., 2020). Finally, the confrontations began to increase and little by little the group became a generator of national and international conflict.

The search for the establishment of a true peace was seen as an almost unattainable goal due to the same background that no previous attempt at dialogue between the Government and the FARC-EP had borne fruit. Presidents Belisario Betancur (1982-1986); César Gaviria (1990-1994); Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) tried to establish peace negotiations that ended up being unsuccessful (Restrepo, 2019).

This conflict in Colombia with more than 60 years of history has left as a consequence a population affected and violated in regards to their human rights. The Single Registry of Victims (2020) in its presentation of figures with a cut-off date of March 31, 2020, estimates that, to date, 8,989,570 people are registered as victims based on victimizing acts such as terrorist acts, attacks, combats, and harassment (85,490), threat (494,014), crimes against freedom and sexual integrity (31,914), forced disappearance (180,308), forced displacement (8,011,693), homicide (1,036,433), antipersonnel mines and explosive device (11,689), kidnapping (37,386), torture (10,804), involvement of children and adolescents (8,216), abandonment or forced dispossession of land (22,820), loss of property, movable or immovable property (119,467). It is important to bear in mind that these data are dynamic, since even in the post-conflict and in the peace process, victims continue to increase daily.

However, during the first term of President Juan Manuel Santos in 2012, dialogues were established between the government and the FARC-EP. In 2016, the first version of the Peace Agreement was achieved, made available to the Colombian people for public knowledge on August 24 of the same year. In order for this Agreement to be legitimate and sustainable, the government considered the importance of citizen participation on the document (mainly because the victims of the conflict were mostly Colombians), and agreed to hold a plebiscite as a way to endorse the agreed. On October 2, 2016, 50.21% of the participants, equivalent to 6,431,376 votes, rejected the Peace Agreement, while 49.78% people, equivalent to 6,377,482 votes, supported it (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, 2016).

Likewise, the current Peace Agreement has also been questioned by other circumstances (Kreuzt & Nussio, 2019). Among the most representative are the following points:

- Delays in the agreement. The latest report from the Krok Institute (2019) stated that, although President Iván Duque continued with the development of the Peace Agreement, since he came to power “the pace of the process has slowed slightly during the first months” (p. 9). He stated that 23% of the commitments have been successfully completed, while 34% present minimal or no advances. The remaining 12% seeks to be completed in the agreed time.
- Increase in murders of social leaders. After the end of the peace negotiations in Havana and the subsequent signing of the agreement, threats and assassinations of social leaders in the country increased (Osorio, 2018). The Institute of Studies for Development and Peace (INDEPAZ), the Agrarian, Peasant, Ethnic and Popular Summit (CACEP) and the Social and Political Coordination March Patriotic revealed in the report of Violation of Human Rights in Times of Peace (2019) that “since the inauguration of President Iván Duque until September 8, 2019, 268 social leaders and human rights defenders have been assassinated in Colombia” (p. 14). If these figures are compared with the other years (starting in 2016 after the implementation of the Peace Agreement), it is correct to affirm that it was the time with the most murdered leaders: 21 cases in 2016, 208 in 2017, 282 in 2018, and 155 cases until September 8, 2019. An approximate figure for 2018 reveals that 169 leaders were assassinated before Iván Duque took office, and 113 died after becoming president until the end of that year.
- One of the most important former FARC-EP chiefs flees. Jesús Santrich, who actively participated in the construction of the Peace Agreement and who was later arrested for drug trafficking crimes between 2017 and 2018, escaped on June 30, 2019 despite the security scheme that the government had assigned him (The Economist, 2019). This fact sparked criticism of the Peace Agreement because it was the transitional justice mechanism, the JEP, which denied Santrich's extradition to the United States due to lack of evidence against him (International Organization for Migration & United States Agency for International Development, 2019).
- Reestablishment of the armed group FARC-EP. On August 29, 2019, Iván Márquez, former FARC-EP commander, one of the main actors in the Peace Agreement negotiations, published a video in which he reported that the group would re-emerge and take up arms again. Among the reasons that led him to make this decision were the government's lack of compliance with the provisions of the Peace Agreement (The New York Times, 2019).

## METHOD

Critical Discourse Analysis (ACD) has its foundations in Discourse Analysis (AD). As Van Dijk (1999) explains, it seeks to study "the way in which the abuse of social power, domination and inequality are practiced, reproduced, and occasionally fought, by texts" (p. 23), especially in political discourses and social. Thus, ACD is based on power relations, since many of the dimensions of society, to a certain extent, are built with discourse, such as politics (Van Dijk, 2002).

The AD identifies the information related to who the user is, how they are using it, why, for what and when they are doing it (Portilla, 2014). It is also important to highlight that oral and written discourse have different characteristics: oral discourse is carried out directly in front of the recipients, having in its favor the use of gestures and different tones of voice, in addition to the possibility of connecting with them; and the written discourse has the strength of having more time for the construction of the text, although the relationship between cohesion and coherence must be well thought out so that the text is explicit and understandable (Martínez, 1994).

The analytical methodology of the ACD, in addition to focusing on linguistic issues, is also used to study the behavior of people at the same time that it allows mixing science and academic discourses with social interactions. In other words, the ACD seeks to analyze social and political problems in order to discover if people's discourse is aimed at obtaining power by manipulating those who are receiving the message. According to Van-Dijk (1999), critical analysis is based on four aspects: 1. The ACD does not focus only on theories and paradigms but also focuses on social problems and political issues; 2. The ACD is an interdisciplinary methodology aligned with areas of language, discourse and communication; 3. The ACD analyzes the sentence and explains the use of language and speech in a broader way; 4. The ACD widely influences the construction of a theory where discourse and society, social power and inequality are related.

The main reason for choosing this methodology is that the analyzed written discourse is situated in the political and social categories, which are the points on which the ACD focuses. Likewise, the changes that were made in the paragraph on victims of the conflict of the Peace Agreement were critically identified with the aim not only of analyzing the word or phrase changed but the paragraph as a whole as a whole. For this, two points were also taken into account: semantics and pragmatics. While the first seeks to find the literal relationship between the meaning and the signifier, the second has to do with the use of language and the meaning that is given to the text according to the same context.

Semantics has to do with the meaning of the words that are used during the communication process (Eco, 2018). It is the relationship found between a word/signifier and what it means/signified. According to Palazón (2019), it is about the relationship that exists between the meaning and the object, as well as “the study of the literal meaning (...) determined exclusively by the sum of the linguistic components” (pp. 195-196). Two branches are added to this linguistic element: connotative and denotative. The connotative meaning has to do with personal interpretation according to experiences and lived situations. The denotative meaning is one that is previously defined and is related to the same object of the text. While the first bases its meaning independently and individually, the second does so in a general and social way.

On the other hand, pragmatics is related to the importance of context and the way in which it can help or distort the meaning of the message with respect to the intention of the sender and the understanding of the receiver. Palazón (2019) is clear when stating that he is in charge of studying “the use and meaning of the statements in relation to the situations in which they occurred” (p. 195), it is not the literary meaning that is sought to identify but rather, the specific meaning of the speaker and what is implicit within the same discourse from a global whole. Thus, it is correct to affirm that the present work took into account the semantic and pragmatic characteristics within the text. This greatly helped to identify the problems and negative situations around what was established in the Peace Agreement.

Based on the changes that were made in the numerals of the point on victims of the conflict, the content of the two versions of the Peace Agreement was analyzed. The first one that was published on August 24, 2016 and the second and final one that was signed and made available to the people on November 24, 2016. The point chosen was number 5 of the Agreement on the Victims of the Conflict. Due to its extension, specific emphasis is placed on numeral 5.1 of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-repetition, more specifically in the following sub-numerals:

- Truth
- Justice - Special Jurisdiction for Peace I and II (part III, due to its jurisprudential content will be reviewed in another text).
- Repair
- Guarantees of Non-Repetition

## Results of the Investigation

The results obtained during the critical analysis of the two versions of the Peace Agreement in the specific numerals of point five on victims of the conflict show that within the

changes there is from new content to clarifications of different types. What has been found can be grouped into five moments as follows:

### **Interpretation of Phrases and Concepts**

Among the most important results, a significant amount of errors was found between the meaning and the significant in relation to the context. The definition of several words is understood on multiple occasions in different ways, not because they have several meanings, but because of the way in which the social, economic, educational, etc. context of each person can modify it. This causes the interpretation of the text to change. Among the consequences of this situation, it is common to find misinformation, the existence of semantic and pragmatic gaps, and even the birth of unnecessary doubts.

The assumption that the public reading the document is familiar with various words pertaining to specific fields of study is a very common mistake. This belief means that the authors of the Peace Agreement do not define in a specific way the meaning of the concepts used, for a better understanding. In the end, a balance between the connotative and the denotative is not achieved, which implies a failed interpretation of the message. An example of this is the use of the term "serious violations". From the denotative sense it refers to the issue of human rights and International Humanitarian Law, and from the connotative it is possible to understand it in a general way, as a breach of any type of norm. The interpretation has to do with the context (in this case educational) in which the person finds himself: for someone with knowledge of law, it is easy to know what kind of violations are being discussed, but for someone who has no education or has focused in another area it is more complex to immediately identify the real meaning that is being talked about.

One of the most significant and influential errors of linguistic interpretation within the Peace Agreement is the use of the words "recommendations" and "suggestions" when talking about legal ties and special regulations where the obligation should be specific and unchangeable. Among the consequences that are generated is the creation of questions related to who decides when something is mandatory or optional, and likewise, the semantic and pragmatic gaps in the interpretation of the norm.

To conclude this point, it is correct to affirm that throughout the text the denotative meaning could not be established at various times, which generated confusion to understand it. Similarly, from the connotative, a positive result could not be obtained due to the lack of a single meaning that could clarify the idea in relation to the context. The erroneous interpretation of the document may be one of the points on which the opposition has relied to support the proposal that the Peace Agreement should be modified for different purposes (which can be positive or negative).

### **Obligations and Commitments**

The second result has to do with the creation of obligations that led to a mandatory commitment being automatically established after the use of certain words that establish different types of responsibility. Long before the Peace Agreement was signed, the content already required immediate compliance with the agreement. Common words include repair, grant, fulfilment, and compromise.

It was also possible to find different moments that changed the communicative intention of the document. First, persuasive language was identified to convince recipients that the Peace Agreement was "good and fair" to achieve peace. Second, there was a tone of manipulation in the first version to make people think that this document was the only way to end the conflict. And third, after the modifications, it was accepted that the document could be changed and that the ideas of the opponents had resulted in a new Peace Agreement, more complete and fair than the previous one.

Finally, the commitments that were acquired between the government and the FARC-EP through the implementation of a specific language and with signatures, oblige them discursively and legally to comply at all costs with what was agreed in parallel and jointly. Although at present the development of the Peace Agreement has been slowed down by the development processes of the current government, the linguistic gaps and the incorrect use of language can also cause a delay in the non-compliance of the agreement. For example, the one established in the Comprehensive System was specific in stating that this body would be in charge of the victims, and at the same time, of applying justice to former FARC-EP combatants who had committed human rights crimes. This has been one of the most debated points because despite the fact that this institution has complied with what is specified, the process has been delayed in the development of its activities.

## **Power Relationships**

The power relationship existing in the discourse is evident from the social positions of the senders and receivers. The actor who holds power is the announcer/creator of the Peace Agreement, who is identified as the Colombian government, the highest social and political position. Those subjected to power are those who receive and interpret the message, which would be the Colombian people, since they are hierarchically below. It should be clarified that, although the FARC-EP group is not accepted in any area for their actions, their disposition and attitude towards the country places them as an announcer in a position of power.

The identification of the participants allows the power relationship to be understood in an easier and faster way, and also to clearly see who are the actors who are committing to comply with everything agreed in the document. It is precisely at this point where it was evident that, although throughout the text the main authors always identified themselves as the Colombian government and the FARC-EP, a third subject appears who generates doubts regarding their identity and who is named as "we have " (U.S). This fact causes the previous power relationship to be distorted.

The doubts that are created as a result of this situation are divided into three: 1. It may be a grammatical error in the construction of the text, which would confirm the premise that the improper use of words alters the final objective of the speech; 2. In case the mention of this subject was on purpose, we try to find the reasons why the authors used that word in a specific way, leaving aside the conventional way in which they had been identifying themselves; 3. Regardless of the true reason for this event, the situation creates mistrust among the decoders of the message who would wonder if the use of "we" will mean greater commitment or an escape route in the future after the lack of clarity.

## **Human Rights**

At this point two specific aspects were found: the first has to be with the linguistic part where pragmatics and semantics influenced people's emotions; and the second is legally related to the fact that the Peace Agreement has been based on the normativity of human rights to create not only its content but also several of its organisms, and even to support the promises and commitments acquired by both authors. To understand them better, their content will be expanded below.

First, from the linguistic point of view, the inclusion of norms related to human rights throughout point five manages to contextualize the recipients on the commitment and reliability of the text. From the semantic, the concept of "human rights" is widely understood, so there is a clear relationship between the sign and the meaning, both for its scientific sense and for the experience of each person. From the pragmatic point of view, the context allows one to have an idea that it is about justice and protection of people despite the use of several words whose meaning may be unknown to those who do not understand the subject, as mentioned in point 3.1.

But when talking about International Humanitarian Law (IHL) the linguistic situation changes. Very few people understand that this regulation is used when it is established that a territory is going through an internal armed conflict, which is clearly applied to the Colombian case (Alarcón, 2019). The lack of contextualization on the subject creates semantic and pragmatic gaps due to the lack of definition of the concept of IHL since these words in isolation do not provide a clear meaning, and although in the context the inference can be made that it has to do with human rights, it is not enough to fully understand it.

Second, the fact that the legal framework of the organizations and the content of the Peace Agreement are based on the normativity of human rights imposes an obligation to comply with the agreement. Furthermore, the commitment of both authors was clear throughout the construction of the document: the Colombian government reaffirming its commitment to the importance of human rights, and the FARC-EP respecting and promoting the content of the Peace Agreement with their former members. As a complement to this point, in relation to the emotions of the recipients, the construction of a document on the legal component of human rights and IHL not only transmits confidence, but also creates an atmosphere of tranquility regarding the development of this of which international organizations are going to be part of the implementation and evaluation of the process). But not everyone who received the text reacted in the same way; some took the meaning from a connotative point of view, based on the historical background of the armed group, and reacted with distrust regarding what could happen in the future, not trusting what they had agreed to in the Peace Agreement but, on the contrary, remaining on the lookout for what could happen in the years following the signing of this.

Finally, taking into account the recent events, it is correct to affirm that the distrust of the people regarding the commitments that the FARC-EP had acquired were based on the same purpose of the armed group. The fact that after three years of implementation of the Peace Agreement, the same participants in this process have publicly announced the reconstruction of the group outside the law not only agrees with those who did not take their word for it, but also fails to comply with all the legal regulations that the document had. In addition, the opponents of the Peace Agreement once again strengthen their discourse of disapproval, but this time supported by facts and results.

### **Stable and Lasting Peace**

One of the phrases that most impacts within the Agreement is “stable and lasting peace”, which allows us to affirm that through this process the conflict would end and peace would be established in the country. However, from a linguistic point of view, the authors (Colombian State and FARC-EP) cannot ratify this because conflicts with this armed group are not the only factor that must be taken into account when speaking of peace in Colombia. The causes of the violence are not limited to the confrontations that the protagonists of the Agreement had had, despite the fact that it was a fairly significant point in the situation.

From the pragmatic point of view, the very title of the Peace Agreement contains errors in generalizing that the document will allow Colombia to end the conflict and establish a lasting peace, when the reality is that the main objective is to stop the confrontations with the group of women. FARC-EP, as well as its very end. Delving into the content of point five, the authors do not mention that these statements relate only to the relationship that both have had for years. From a pragmatic point of view, the context of the situation makes it possible to understand that the end of the conflict and the peace that is being talked about will only occur between the government and the aforementioned armed group, and not in a broad and general way as is stated. he was presenting the idea. The other factors of violence, such as other armed groups, drug trafficking, organized crime, etc., continue to exist until a solution is found.

Finally, it is correct to say that, despite the commitment and responsibility acquired by the authors of the Peace Agreement, it is linguistically impossible for them to ensure what they call "stable and lasting peace" for all that this possibility entails. The words used were not the

most appropriate, and the pragmatic and syntactic vacuum that is created around this situation means that what is being promised is not entirely real, and that its content is nothing more than a smokescreen that encloses a small part of what the conflict in Colombia is, making it look like a whole together.

## CONCLUSION

The first thing that can be highlighted from the analysis carried out on the two versions of the Peace Agreement is that the tone of the message delivered by the Colombian government and the FARC-EP was one of conviction and confidence-building by using legal and regulatory ties for its construction, in addition to the promises, obligations and commitments acquired by both actors for the development of this. However, the critical analysis of the discourse on the phrases and words showed the existence of a linguistic gap regarding the lack of clarity of various concepts. In addition to the pragmatic and semantic errors around its content. Although point five focuses on the justice that people who have violated rights and other types of regulations will receive, and the legal measures that criminals who participated in breaking the law will have to face, the pragmatic and semantic failures of the law. message deliver a distorted and misunderstood message by many. In this sense, it should be noted then that the victims, although they have real legal protection, it is weak in the face of contextual considerations.

It is also correct to affirm that the errors in the document promote a situation of misinformation after the erroneous modification of the message. Although it is true that the second version of the Peace Agreement fixes several problems found in the first version, the original message continues to be modified in an erroneous and even negative way due to the use of the same language. The construction of a neutral discourse not only keeps the communicative intention intact, but also helps the recipients to fully understand what is being communicated. Regarding the objectives of the study, it was possible to comply with the main one, which was to carry out a critical analysis of the discourse on the two versions of point five of the Peace Agreement. The way in which this point could be made was by comparing both texts in detail to point out the changes made and thus critically analyze them. This resulted in the identification of linguistic conflicts in the context and the solution of some of these in the preparation of the second text. Regarding the specific objectives, it was possible to decode the semantic keys of the document by creating the critical categories of discourse that summarize the most important points found. It was also possible to identify the pragmatic communicative intention where the political tone and the way in which the occupants of power are directed towards the dominated, which are society, was evidenced, in addition to the alterations that occurred in the interpretation of the agreement.

Lastly, linguistic errors and negative situations presented in the context in relation to the pragmatic and the semantic could have been one of the reasons why the Peace Agreement is currently affected. The opponents took advantage of the gaps found throughout the text to slow down its development, which was interpreted by the FARC-EP group as a breach of the agreement by the State, which in the end resulted in the violation of the law and the rebirth of the guerrilla group.

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Camila Cajiao, Social communicator of the Universidad Santiago de Cali, University master's degree in human rights, democracy and globalization from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Email: cami\_cajiao@hotmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3051-913X>

Juan Fernando León Cano, Psychologist from the Universidad Santiago de Cali, Young researcher from the Humanities and University group of the Universidad Santiago de Cali, Researcher from the Fundación Universitaria de Popayán. Diploma in Peacebuilding and Human



Rights, Escuela Superior de Administración Pública, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4385-5220>, Email: [juanleof@hotmail.com](mailto:juanleof@hotmail.com)

Edward Javier Ordóñez, Doctoral candidate in Applied Science, Universidad Antonio Nariño, Master in Philosophy, from the Meritorious Autonomous, Universidad de Puebla, Psychologist, Universidad San Buenaventura de Cali, Philosopher, Universidad del Valle, Full-time research professor at the Universidad Santiago de Cali, Senior Researcher at Colciencias, Leader of the Humanities and University group with category A, of the Universidad Santiago de Cali, Latest publications: Equality in affirmative actions in Latin America, Comparative approach, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4803-0340>, Email: [javier.ordonez00@usc.edu.co](mailto:javier.ordonez00@usc.edu.co)

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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### ENDNOTES

- 1) In 1997 the FARC collected 530 million and about 348 million, which corresponds to 65%, came from drug trafficking through the protection of traffickers or the direct participation of the armed group with production. (Ortíz, 1999).

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