REMUNOM
ISSN 2178-6925

Received: 13/01/2026 - **Accepted:** 11/03/2026
Vol: 13.02
DOI: 10.66104/7nkhrn32
Pages: 1-17

SOCIAL NETWORKS CREATED BY JESUS DURING HIS MINISTRY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW AND JOHN

REDES SOCIAIS CRIADAS POR JESUS DURANTE SEU MINISTÉRIO: UMA ANÁLISE SOCIOLINGUÍSTICA DOS EVANGELHOS DE MATEUS E JOÃO

REDES SOCIALES CREADAS POR JESÚS DURANTE SU MINISTERIO: UN ANÁLISIS SOCIOLINGÜÍSTICO DE LOS EVANGELIOS DE MATEO Y JUAN

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ABSTRACT
This paper analyzes the social networks created by Jesus during His ministry on the basis of selected passages from the Gospels of Matthew and John. More specifically, it examines how interpersonal interactions, discourse strategies, and represented relational structures contribute to the formation, consolidation, and expansion of these networks. The study is grounded in sociolinguistic and social network approaches, especially in the contributions of Labov (1972), Gumperz (1976), Milroy (1980), Bortoni-Ricardo (1985; 2011), Mitchell (1969), Granovetter (1973), and Borgatti et al. (2009). Methodologically, the research is qualitative, documentary, and interpretive, based on a thematic and category-guided analysis of selected Gospel passages. In order to strengthen analytical consistency, the study adopts explicit criteria for corpus selection and operational definitions for the concepts employed, such as tie formation, multiplexity, communicative integration, boundary crossing, and diffusion potential. The analysis shows that the Gospel narratives do not allow a formal graph-based measurement of social networks; however, they do provide sufficient textual evidence for a qualitative reconstruction of relational patterns. In Matthew, Jesus is portrayed as transforming occupational and local ties into discipleship ties, while also producing discursive cohesion through repetitive and memorable speech. In John, the encounters with the Samaritan woman and with the Greeks reveal processes of boundary crossing, mediation, and network expansion beyond a restricted in-group. The article argues that the selected narratives portray a movement from relatively bounded relational circles toward wider and more heterogeneous networks, which helps explain, at the level of textual representation, the communicative spread and endurance of Jesus' message.

Keywords: social networks; sociolinguistics; Gospel of Matthew; Gospel of John; Jesus' ministry.

RESUMO
Este artigo analisa as redes sociais criadas por Jesus durante Seu ministério com base em passagens selecionadas dos Evangelhos de Mateus e João. Mais especificamente, examina como as interações interpessoais, as estratégias discursivas e as estruturas relacionais representadas contribuem para a formação, a consolidação e a expansão dessas redes. O estudo fundamenta-se em abordagens sociolinguísticas e de redes sociais, especialmente nas contribuições de Labov (1972), Gumperz (1976), Milroy (1980), Bortoni-Ricardo (1985; 2011), Mitchell (1969), Granovetter (1973) e Borgatti et al. (2009). Metodologicamente, a pesquisa é qualitativa, documental e interpretativista, baseada em uma análise temática e orientada por categorias de passagens selecionadas dos Evangelhos. A fim de fortalecer a consistência analítica, o estudo adota critérios explícitos para a seleção do corpus e definições operacionais para os conceitos empregados, tais como formação de laços, multiplexidade, integração comunicativa, transposição de fronteiras e potencial de difusão. A análise mostra que as narrativas evangélicas não permitem uma mensuração formal, baseada em grafos, das redes sociais; contudo, fornecem evidências textuais suficientes para uma reconstrução qualitativa dos padrões

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relacionais. Em Mateus, Jesus é retratado como transformando laços ocupacionais e locais em laços de discipulado, ao mesmo tempo em que produz coesão discursiva por meio de uma fala repetitiva e memorável. Em João, os encontros com a mulher samaritana e com os gregos revelam processos de transposição de fronteiras, mediação e expansão da rede para além de um grupo interno restrito. O artigo sustenta que as narrativas selecionadas representam um movimento que vai de círculos relacionais relativamente delimitados em direção a redes mais amplas e heterogêneas, o que ajuda a explicar, no plano da representação textual, a difusão comunicativa e a permanência da mensagem de Jesus.

Palavras-chave: redes sociais; sociolinguística; Evangelho de Mateus; Evangelho de João; ministério de Jesus.

RESUMEN
Este artículo analiza las redes sociales creadas por Jesús durante Su ministerio a partir de pasajes seleccionados de los Evangelios de Mateo y Juan. Más específicamente, examina cómo las interacciones interpersonales, las estrategias discursivas y las estructuras relacionales representadas contribuyen a la formación, la consolidación y la expansión de esas redes. El estudio se fundamenta en enfoques sociolingüísticos y de redes sociales, especialmente en las contribuciones de Labov (1972), Gumperz (1976), Milroy (1980), Bortoni-Ricardo (1985; 2011), Mitchell (1969), Granovetter (1973) y Borgatti et al. (2009). Metodológicamente, la investigación es cualitativa, documental e interpretativa, basada en un análisis temático y guiado por categorías de pasajes seleccionados de los Evangelios. Con el fin de fortalecer la consistencia analítica, el estudio adopta criterios explícitos para la selección del corpus y definiciones operativas para los conceptos empleados, tales como formación de vínculos, multiplexidad, integración comunicativa, cruce de fronteras y potencial de difusión. El análisis muestra que las narrativas evangélicas no permiten una medición formal, basada en grafos, de las redes sociales; sin embargo, proporcionan evidencias textuales suficientes para una reconstrucción cualitativa de los patrones relacionales. En Mateo, Jesús es retratado como transformando vínculos ocupacionales y locales en vínculos de discipulado, al mismo tiempo que produce cohesión discursiva mediante un discurso repetitivo y memorable. En Juan, los encuentros con la mujer samaritana y con los griegos revelan procesos de cruce de fronteras, mediación y expansión de la red más allá de un grupo interno restringido. El artículo sostiene que las narrativas seleccionadas representan un movimiento que va de círculos relacionales relativamente delimitados hacia redes más amplias y heterogéneas, lo que ayuda a explicar, en el plano de la representación textual, la difusión comunicativa y la permanencia del mensaje de Jesús.

Palabras clave: redes sociales; sociolingüística; Evangelio de Mateo; Evangelio de Juan; ministerio de Jesús.

1 INTRODUCTION

Social relations are central to the circulation of language, values, and beliefs. For this reason, the study of networks has become an important analytical path in sociolinguistics and related fields interested in how communication is socially organized. Rather than treating interaction as a mere background for discourse, network-based approaches examine how ties among individuals shape access to information, regulate group norms, and condition the diffusion of meanings through communities (Mitchell, 1969; Milroy, 1980; Borgatti et al., 2009).

In this article, we analyze the social networks created by Jesus during His ministry, taking selected passages from the Gospels of Matthew and John as our documentary corpus. The purpose is not to produce a theological reading of the texts, nor to reconstruct a

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historically measurable social graph of first-century Palestine. Instead, our aim is to investigate how these narratives represent the formation of ties, the reconfiguration of relationships, the crossing of social boundaries, and the expansion of communicative reach around Jesus. In this sense, the study adopts a sociolinguistic and discourse-oriented perspective, according to which language is inseparable from social interaction and social meaning (Labov, 1972; Gumperz, 1976).

The choice of Matthew and John is deliberate. Matthew offers key scenes related to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, including the calling of the first disciples, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Great Commission. John, in turn, presents interactions marked by strong dialogical density and symbolic boundary crossing, such as the encounter with the Samaritan woman and the episode involving the Greeks who seek Jesus. Taken together, these two Gospels provide a useful narrative axis for observing both the constitution of an initial circle of followers and the representation of a broader movement toward expansion.

This study has one general objective: to analyze the types of social networks represented in the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and John. More specifically, we seek: (a) to identify the social groups and interpersonal ties represented in selected passages; (b) to characterize these ties in terms of network-related categories such as tie formation, multiplexity, communicative integration, and boundary crossing; and (c) to discuss how discourse strategies and relational configurations contribute to the diffusion potential of Jesus' message.

From these objectives derive the following research questions: What types of social ties are represented in the selected passages? How do the narratives portray the constitution and expansion of relational networks around Jesus? Which discourse strategies contribute to group cohesion and communicative integration? In what ways do the selected scenes indicate movement beyond relatively restricted circles toward more heterogeneous and expansive relational configurations?

Our working hypothesis is that the selected passages portray Jesus' ministry as a process of network formation and expansion in which interpersonal ties are not merely added one by one, but are also redefined symbolically and communicatively. In this process, discourse plays a decisive role: Jesus' speech acts, metaphors, invitations, and public teachings do not simply transmit content; they help create affiliation, stabilize group identity, and open channels for wider circulation.

The study is situated at the intersection of sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and social network studies. Classical sociolinguistic works have shown that linguistic behavior is

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socially structured and that the diffusion of norms depends on the organization of interaction in a given community (Labov, 1972; Gumperz, 1976; Milroy, 1980). In parallel, the literature on social networks has demonstrated that density, tie strength, multiplexity, and brokerage are relevant for understanding cohesion and diffusion processes (Granovetter, 1973; Borgatti et al., 2009). Moreover, studies on social movements and religion have shown that collective projects spread not only through doctrines or ideas, but also through relational mechanisms, mediation, and access to broader publics (Diani; McAdam, 2003).

The present article is organized into five sections. After this introduction, the theoretical framework discusses the relationship between sociolinguistics and social network analysis, as well as the operational categories used in the study. The methodology section then explains the qualitative design, the criteria for corpus selection, and the analytical procedures. The following section presents the analysis of selected passages from Matthew and John. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the main findings, limitations, and contributions of the study.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Social networks and sociolinguistic inquiry

The study of social networks has contributed significantly to the understanding of how communicative practices are embedded in social life. Mitchell (1969) defines networks as systems of social relations in which the emphasis falls on the ties among actors rather than on isolated individual attributes. From this perspective, the analysis of social life requires attention to patterns of interaction, repeated contact, and the positions individuals occupy within a relational structure.

In sociolinguistics, this perspective became especially productive with the work of Milroy (1980), who demonstrated that network structure influences linguistic maintenance and change. Dense and multiplex networks tend to reinforce local norms because individuals are connected through overlapping roles and frequent interactions. Conversely, looser or less multiplex networks facilitate contact with external groups and, consequently, increase the possibility of linguistic and social diffusion. Milroy's contribution is important because it shifts the explanatory focus from abstract social categories alone to actual relational configurations.

Labov (1972), although not primarily a network theorist, also established a decisive foundation for this discussion by demonstrating that linguistic variation is socially patterned and that the speech community is characterized by structured heterogeneity. Language use cannot be detached from social organization; rather, variation emerges in communities

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whose speakers occupy different positions and participate in different interactional practices. Gumperz (1976), in turn, emphasizes the role of contextualization, interaction, and the social interpretation of meaning. His work is particularly relevant here because it makes clear that communicative exchanges are not neutral vehicles of information: they are socially situated acts that index relations, identities, and alignments.

Bortoni-Ricardo (1985; 2011) further expands the relevance of network analysis by showing how migration, mobility, and changes in patterns of interaction affect linguistic behavior. Her work demonstrates that network structures are not merely descriptive social forms; they actively participate in the maintenance or transformation of norms and identities. In this sense, social networks are useful not only for the study of phonological or morphosyntactic variation, but also for broader analyses of communication, integration, and diffusion.

At the same time, the discussion of diffusion benefits from Granovetter's (1973) reflection on the strength of weak ties. Granovetter argues that weak ties often function as bridges between otherwise disconnected groups. Although strong ties are crucial for trust and internal cohesion, weak or bridging ties may be decisive for the circulation of new information across social boundaries. This insight is particularly helpful for interpreting scenes in which Jesus' interactions move beyond an initial circle of followers and reach individuals or groups marked as socially, morally, or ethnically distinct.

More recent work in social network analysis has further clarified that networks can be studied in relation to various processes, including diffusion, support, coordination, and brokerage (Borgatti et al., 2009). In the field of social movements, Diani and McAdam (2003) show that collective expansion depends heavily on relational channels, mediators, and mobilizing structures. Such studies are relevant to the present article because they allow us to understand the spread of a message not as a purely abstract or ideological phenomenon, but as a socially mediated process.

2.2 Social networks, religion, and communicative diffusion

Religious movements do not spread exclusively through doctrinal propositions. They circulate through people, ties, and socially meaningful interactions. For this reason, network approaches have proven especially fruitful in the study of religion, conversion, and collective identity. Even when a corpus is textual and not ethnographic, narratives may encode relational mechanisms such as affiliation, mediation, inclusion, and expansion.

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In the case of the Gospels, the relevant question is not whether the texts provide enough data for a formal network model in the graph-theoretical sense. They do not. The question is whether the narratives represent social relations in a sufficiently explicit way to permit qualitative interpretation in light of network concepts. The answer, in our view, is yes. The selected passages depict calls, encounters, mediated contact, public teaching, collective reception, exclusion, and incorporation. These are all relational events that may be analyzed qualitatively.

Such an approach must be methodologically cautious. Terms such as density and multiplexity cannot be used loosely as rhetorical labels. Since the corpus is textual and selective, these concepts must be handled as interpretive categories grounded in observable features of the narratives rather than as statistically measurable properties. The aim, therefore, is not to claim precision that the corpus cannot support, but to offer a disciplined qualitative account of represented ties and communicative dynamics.

2.3 Operational categories used in the analysis

For the purposes of this study, five categories organize the analysis:

1. **Tie formation**: moments in which a new interpersonal relation is initiated, invited, or reoriented.
2. **Multiplexity**: overlap of more than one relational dimension in a tie, such as occupational, local, religious, or pedagogical dimensions.
3. **Communicative integration**: discursive strategies that create cohesion, alignment, and shared orientation within an emerging group.
4. **Boundary crossing**: interactions that traverse explicit social, ethnic, moral, or status boundaries.
5. **Diffusion potential**: textual features that suggest the possibility of expanding the message beyond the immediate interactional setting.

These categories do not function as rigid variables in a quantitative model. Rather, they serve as analytic tools that allow us to relate discourse to relational structure in a transparent way.

To make this procedure explicit, Table 1 summarizes the categories and the indicators that guided the analysis.

Table 1 – Analytical categories and textual indicators

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Category	Working definition	Main textual indicators
Tie formation	Establishment or reorientation of a social relation	call, invitation, following, direct address, relational reclassification
Multiplexity	Overlap of more than one social role or tie dimension	shared occupation, locality, discipleship, household contact, repeated co-presence
Communicative integration	Discursive production of cohesion and shared alignment	public teaching, repetition, parallelism, memorable formulations, collective address
Boundary crossing	Interaction across visible social or symbolic divisions	contact with marginalized or out-group actors, ethnic crossing, status reconfiguration
Diffusion potential	Possibility of expansion beyond the immediate circle	intermediary actor, broader audience, translocal orientation, relayed message

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026)

This framework allows the analysis to remain sociolinguistically grounded while also engaging the broader literature on networks and diffusion.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study is qualitative, descriptive, and documentary in nature. It is qualitative because it seeks to interpret represented social and communicative relations rather than to measure them statistically. It is descriptive because it aims to characterize the network-related properties that emerge from the selected passages. It is documentary because the corpus consists of written texts, namely passages from the Gospels of Matthew and John (Gil, 2019; Cervo; Bervian, 2002).

The study also adopts thematic analysis as an interpretive procedure, particularly in the sense proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), since it involves identifying recurrent themes and patterns in the corpus. However, thematic analysis here is not conducted in a free or merely intuitive manner. It is guided by the operational categories defined in the theoretical framework.

3.2 Corpus delimitation

The broader corpus of the study consists of the canonical biblical text. The analytical sample, however, is restricted to selected passages from the Gospels of Matthew and John.

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This delimitation was adopted for three reasons. First, Matthew includes central scenes of group formation and public instruction. Second, John offers highly dialogical episodes marked by symbolic and social boundary crossing. Third, the combination of these two Gospels allows observation of both initial group consolidation and broader expansion dynamics.

The decision to focus on only two Gospels necessarily limits the scope of the study. The synoptic parallels and other relevant passages in Mark and Luke could enrich the discussion. Nevertheless, the present delimitation is methodologically justified because the analysis does not seek exhaustive coverage of all Gospel material, but a focused examination of selected relational and discursive scenes.

3.3 Criteria for passage selection

The selected passages were chosen according to four explicit criteria:

1. the passage must contain an identifiable interpersonal or group interaction;
2. the passage must allow observation of at least one of the analytical categories adopted in this study;
3. the passage must include sufficient discursive material to support interpretation of communication strategies;
4. the passage must contribute to the overall objective of analyzing the formation, consolidation, or expansion of networks around Jesus.

Based on these criteria, the following passages were selected from the original corpus used in the manuscript: Matthew 4:18–22; Matthew 5:1–12; Matthew 9:9–13; Matthew 28:19–20; John 4:7–26; John 4:28–30; and John 12:20–24.

3.4 Analytical procedures

The analysis followed four stages. First, the Gospels of Matthew and John were read in full, with attention to scenes involving explicit social interaction. Second, the passages most relevant to the research objectives were extracted and organized. Third, each passage was coded according to the five analytical categories described above. Fourth, the coded passages were interpreted in light of sociolinguistic and network-based literature, with attention to both relational structure and discourse strategies.

Table 2 summarizes the relation between the selected passages and the main analytical focus.

Table 2 – Selected passages and analytical focus

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Passage	Main analytical focus
Matthew 4:18–22	tie formation; multiplexity; initial network consolidation
Matthew 5:1–12	communicative integration; public discourse; group alignment
Matthew 9:9–13	boundary crossing; reconfiguration of social affiliation
Matthew 28:19–20	diffusion potential; translocal expansion
John 4:7–26	boundary crossing; dialogical mediation; symbolic reclassification
John 4:28–30	intermediary action; local diffusion
John 12:20–24	brokerage; expansion toward broader publics

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026)

3.5 Methodological limitations

This study has clear limitations. First, the corpus is textual, not ethnographic. Consequently, it does not permit formal measurement of network properties such as density, centrality, or tie strength in a technical sense. Second, the selected passages are narratively mediated and therefore represent social relations rather than directly recording them. Third, because only Matthew and John are analyzed, the conclusions must remain limited to the selected material.

For this reason, our claims remain interpretive and circumscribed. We do not infer a complete historical map of Jesus' social networks. Instead, we analyze how the selected Gospel narratives represent relational dynamics and communicative expansion.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Matthew 4:18–22 and the formation of an initial network

Matthew 4:18–22 narrates the calling of Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John. The passage begins with Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee and seeing two brothers who were casting a net into the sea, "for they were fishermen." He then addresses them with the imperative: "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." The narrative continues with the immediate response of the two brothers, followed by the calling of James and John, who also leave their boat and their father to follow Jesus.

This scene is central to the category of tie formation. The imperative "Follow Me" is not merely an informational utterance; it is a relational act that redefines the social orientation of the interlocutors. Jesus does not simply invite these men to listen to Him occasionally. He

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calls them into a new form of affiliation. In sociolinguistic terms, the speech act establishes a durable tie that reorganizes prior roles and allegiances.

At the same time, the passage illustrates a restrained form of multiplexity. The men called by Jesus already share occupational and local ties: they are brothers, fishermen, and inhabitants of the same region. Jesus' intervention does not erase these previous relations; rather, it overlays them with a new discipleship tie. In this sense, the emerging network acquires a multiplex character because pre-existing bonds are incorporated into a new relational frame. As Milroy (1980) notes, multiplex relations are especially relevant for cohesion because they connect individuals across more than one domain of life.

The immediacy emphasized in the narrative is also significant. The expressions "at once" or "immediately" intensify the force of the relational shift. From a discourse perspective, the brevity of the command and the rapidity of response contribute to the representation of charismatic authority and network consolidation. The network here is not yet broad, but it is cohesive in its beginnings because it is built through direct and consequential relational reorientation.

Thus, Matthew 4:18–22 portrays the emergence of an initial circle structured around strong affiliation and overlapping relational dimensions. Rather than reading this as empirical proof of measurable density, it is more methodologically sound to state that the passage represents the conditions for a cohesive network nucleus.

4.2 Matthew 5:1–12 and communicative integration through public discourse

Matthew 5:1–12, the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, is crucial for understanding communicative integration. The text states that Jesus saw the crowds, went up the mountain, sat down, and His disciples came to Him. He then began to teach, articulating a sequence of beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," "Blessed are those who mourn," "Blessed are the meek," and so forth.

This passage is not primarily about tie formation in the narrow sense, but about the discursive consolidation of a group orientation. The repeated formula "Blessed are..." functions as a rhetorical pattern of parallelism and repetition. From a discourse-analytic perspective, such repetition creates rhythm, memorability, and cumulative emphasis. From a sociolinguistic perspective, it contributes to communicative integration because it produces shared interpretive frames and collective moral alignment.

Gumperz (1976) reminds us that meaning is inseparable from interactional context. In this case, Jesus' discourse is delivered in a setting where disciples and crowds are co-

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present. The speech is therefore both intimate and public. It consolidates the identity of an emerging circle while simultaneously projecting a wider audience. The discourse is not restricted to private instruction; it is publicly oriented, which increases its diffusion potential.

Moreover, the Beatitudes revalue social categories often associated with marginality or vulnerability. The poor in spirit, the meek, the persecuted, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are discursively repositioned. This symbolic inversion is relevant because it broadens the potential appeal of the message. In network terms, one may say that Jesus' discourse does not merely bind insiders together; it also constructs a framework capable of incorporating persons whose social location might otherwise place them at the edge of dominant structures.

Therefore, Matthew 5:1–12 reveals that network consolidation is not achieved only through face-to-face calling, but also through discourse that organizes values, identities, and shared expectations. The sermon contributes to the cohesion of the network by creating a common symbolic vocabulary.

4.3 Matthew 9:9–13 and the reconfiguration of social boundaries

Matthew 9:9–13 presents the calling of Matthew, a tax collector, followed by a meal shared with "many tax collectors and sinners." This passage is especially important for the category of boundary crossing. Tax collectors occupied a socially stigmatized position within the Jewish context under Roman domination. Their association with revenue collection and collaboration with imperial structures made them objects of suspicion and rejection.

When Jesus says to Matthew, "Follow Me," the same formula of tie formation seen in Matthew 4 reappears, but in a markedly different social context. Here, the new tie crosses a visible moral and social boundary. The issue is made explicit in the Pharisees' question: "Why does your Master eat with tax collectors and sinners?" The table scene transforms the individual call into a broader reconfiguration of affiliation. A socially marked figure is not simply tolerated; he is incorporated into relational proximity.

The meal itself functions as a strong marker of social alignment. Shared table fellowship has relational value because it creates and displays group belonging. In sociolinguistic and anthropological terms, such practices communicate inclusion not only verbally but also interactionally. Jesus' response, "Those who are healthy have no need of a physician, but those who are sick," is framed metaphorically. The metaphor serves at least two discursive functions. First, it legitimizes the interaction through a morally intelligible frame.

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Second, it shifts the terms of evaluation: those seen as impure or deviant are repositioned as those in need of care rather than exclusion.

This passage therefore illustrates how discourse and interaction operate together. The call to Matthew creates a tie; the meal expands that tie into a social scene; the metaphorical response to the Pharisees provides interpretive justification for the boundary crossing. In this sense, the episode exemplifies how Jesus' network expands not only numerically, but also socially. It incorporates actors whose inclusion alters the symbolic boundaries of the group.

4.4 Matthew 28:19–20 and the representation of diffusion potential

Matthew 28:19–20 contains the so-called Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." This passage differs from the previous ones because it no longer focuses on a localized face-to-face interaction alone. Instead, it articulates an explicit orientation toward translocal expansion.

From the perspective of network analysis, this is the clearest instance of diffusion potential in the selected Matthew corpus. The imperative "go" redirects the disciples outward. The phrase "all nations" removes the mission from a restricted circle and projects it toward heterogeneous populations. The discourse here does not describe a completed global network; rather, it formulates a principle of expansion.

The sociolinguistic significance of this passage lies in its communicative horizon. A message that is to be taught across different peoples necessarily presupposes mediation, adaptation, and circulation beyond immediate co-presence. In this sense, the passage is less about measurable density and more about the representational logic of diffusion. It imagines a network capable of extending across cultural boundaries.

This movement is consistent with the distinction between cohesive local structures and broader expansive structures discussed in the literature on networks and diffusion (Granovetter, 1973; Borgatti et al., 2009). If the initial calling scenes in Matthew emphasize direct and relatively strong affiliation, the Great Commission introduces a broader relational horizon in which the message is to be relayed, reproduced, and taught across multiple contexts.

Thus, Matthew 28:19–20 should be interpreted not as evidence that a global network is already empirically mapped in the narrative, but as a discursive representation of expansionist orientation. It marks the passage from local consolidation to translocal projection.

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4.5 John 4:7–26 and the crossing of ethnic, gender, and moral boundaries

John 4:7–26 narrates the encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. This episode is one of the richest in the corpus because it combines dialogical density, social tension, and symbolic reclassification. The woman's first response makes the boundary explicit: "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" The text itself foregrounds the fact that Jews and Samaritans did not ordinarily share this kind of interaction.

The scene therefore clearly exemplifies boundary crossing. The barriers involved are multiple: ethnic, religious, gendered, and moral. This multiplicity makes the passage particularly relevant for a network-based reading because the encounter is not simply interpersonal; it traverses several social divisions at once.

The dialogue is also notable for its communicative strategy. Jesus introduces the metaphor of "living water," beginning from a concrete situation of thirst and gradually shifting the conversation to a symbolic and spiritual plane. This discursive movement is important. It does not impose abstract teaching without context; rather, it builds meaning through interaction, progressively reorienting the interpretive frame of the interlocutor. In Gumperz's (1976) terms, the exchange depends on contextualization and inferential work. Meaning is negotiated through the interplay between literal and figurative levels.

The conversation further intensifies when Jesus addresses the woman's personal life. The point of the exchange is not merely moral exposure; rather, it contributes to a process of reclassification. The woman, initially positioned as socially distant, becomes a recipient of revelation and then a potential mediator. The passage thus moves from boundary crossing to relational transformation.

From a sociolinguistic standpoint, the episode is highly significant because the discursive strategy itself enables inclusion. Jesus' use of metaphor, progressive clarification, and dialogical engagement allows the interaction to move from distance to recognition. Therefore, John 4:7–26 is not only a scene of personal conversion in a theological sense; it is also a scene of communicative incorporation and network opening.

4.6 John 4:28–30 and the woman as intermediary in local diffusion

The next movement of the narrative is crucial. In John 4:28–30, the woman leaves her water jar, goes back to the city, and says to the people: "Come, see a man who told me

REMUNOM
ISSN 2178-6925

Received: 13/01/2026 - **Accepted:** 11/03/2026
Vol: 13.02
DOI: 10.66104/7nkhrn32
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all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" As a result, the text states that people went out of the city and came to Him.

This passage is especially important for the category of diffusion potential because it shows how a previously external or marginal figure becomes an intermediary. The woman is no longer only the recipient of a message; she becomes a relay within the network. Her utterance to the townspeople functions as mediated transmission. In network terms, she occupies a bridging position between Jesus and the local population.

This is one of the clearest examples in the corpus of how interaction generates further interaction. The encounter at the well does not remain confined to the two interlocutors. It produces a second-order relational effect: the message reaches others through the woman's speech. In this sense, the narrative illustrates a mechanism analogous to brokerage or mediation, which is central in the literature on networks and diffusion (Borgatti et al., 2009).

The rhetorical structure of the woman's speech is also noteworthy. The invitation "Come, see..." is concise, memorable, and interactionally effective. It does not offer systematic doctrine; it invites encounter. This suggests that diffusion in the narrative is not always driven by elaborate exposition, but often by short utterances capable of mobilizing curiosity and movement.

Therefore, John 4:28–30 represents a decisive moment in which communicative inclusion becomes network expansion. The woman's role demonstrates that the network does not grow only by direct action from Jesus, but also by the activation of new intermediaries.

4.7 John 12:20–24 and expansion beyond the immediate ethnoreligious circle

John 12:20–24 introduces another important scene: "there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast," and they approached Philip, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." The presence of Greeks signals an expansion beyond a strictly local or intra-Jewish horizon. Moreover, the fact that they approach Philip, who then interacts with Andrew before Jesus responds, introduces a mediated chain of access.

This detail is analytically important. Unlike the direct call scenes in Matthew 4, here the relation to Jesus is not immediate. It is mediated through other actors. Such mediation is significant in network terms because it indicates a more complex relational structure, one in which access occurs through intermediaries. Philip and Andrew function as connectors between Jesus and an emerging broader public.

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Jesus' response, including the image of the grain of wheat that must die in order to bear much fruit, further reorients the scene toward expansion. The metaphor suggests multiplication through apparent loss and extension beyond immediate visibility. Even if the text is theologically dense, it also has clear communicative implications: the message is represented as something whose fruition depends on a process of transmission and enlargement.

This passage can therefore be read as a textual sign of expansion toward broader and more heterogeneous audiences. The Greeks are not yet presented as full members of a defined network, but their presence indicates permeability and widened reach. In this sense, John 12:20–24 contributes to the same larger movement seen in Matthew 28:19–20: the network around Jesus is represented as moving beyond restricted circles toward broader publics.

4.8 Synthesis of the analysis

Taken together, the selected passages portray a progression. In Matthew 4:18–22, the emphasis falls on the formation of an initial cohesive nucleus. In Matthew 5:1–12, discourse produces communicative integration and shared alignment. In Matthew 9:9–13, the incorporation of tax collectors and sinners marks a reconfiguration of symbolic boundaries. In Matthew 28:19–20, the network acquires a translocal orientation. In John 4:7–30, ethnic, gendered, and moral boundaries are crossed, and a new intermediary emerges. Finally, in John 12:20–24, access through mediators and the presence of Greeks indicate widening permeability.

The main point is not that the texts provide enough information to measure density, centrality, or full relational structure in a formal sense. Rather, they allow us to identify represented patterns of relational formation, symbolic inclusion, and communicative expansion. This is where the sociolinguistic value of the analysis lies. The passages show that discourse is not external to network formation; it is one of its constitutive mechanisms. Commands, metaphors, repeated formulas, invitations, and public teaching all contribute to the establishment, stabilization, and enlargement of relational ties.

5 CONCLUSION

This article has examined selected passages from the Gospels of Matthew and John in order to analyze how Jesus' ministry is represented in terms of social network formation, communicative integration, and expansion. Drawing on sociolinguistics and social network

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theory, we argued that the selected narratives portray a movement from relatively bounded and cohesive relational circles toward wider and more heterogeneous configurations.

The analysis showed that Matthew 4:18–22 represents the formation of an initial network nucleus through direct calling and relational reorientation. Matthew 5:1–12 demonstrates that public discourse contributes to communicative integration by creating shared values and interpretive alignment. Matthew 9:9–13 reveals that network growth involves the crossing of social and moral boundaries, especially through the incorporation of marginalized figures. Matthew 28:19–20 projects the network beyond local limits and frames diffusion as a constitutive part of the mission.

In the Gospel of John, the encounter with the Samaritan woman shows how dialogical interaction, metaphorical language, and symbolic reclassification enable boundary crossing and inclusion. The subsequent movement of the woman toward the city illustrates mediated diffusion, since she becomes an intermediary who connects Jesus to a wider local public. Finally, John 12:20–24 suggests expansion toward broader and more heterogeneous audiences through mediated access and universalizing symbolism.

From a methodological standpoint, the study reinforces the importance of handling network concepts with caution when the corpus is textual rather than ethnographic. The selected passages support a qualitative reconstruction of represented ties and communicative processes, but they do not allow formal network measurement. For this reason, our conclusions remain interpretive and limited to the analyzed material.

Even with these limits, the study contributes to interdisciplinary research by showing that the Gospels may be fruitfully read as narratives of relational formation and communicative diffusion. More specifically, it suggests that Jesus' ministry is represented not only through isolated teachings or miraculous events, but also through the creation of ties, the redefinition of boundaries, and the circulation of discourse through expanding relational channels. Future studies may broaden this investigation by incorporating Mark and Luke, comparing Gospel representations, or developing conceptual diagrams that further clarify the relational structure implied in the narratives.

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