

AIRING ETHNIC AND LINGUISTIC IDENTITIES THROUGH PUBLIC MEDIA COMIC PERFORMANCES: CHALLENGING AND REINSCRIBING NORMATIVE IDEOLOGIES

VENTILANDO IDENTIDADES ÉTNICAS E LINGUÍSTICAS POR MEIO DE ATUAÇÕES CÔMICAS PÚBLICAS NA MÍDIA: DESAFIO E REFORÇO A IDEOLOGIAS NORMATIVAS

*Pedro de Moraes Garcez*¹

ABSTRACT: This essay discusses double voicings in heteroglossic public media comic performances of ethnic and linguistic identities. The objective is to show an example of how airing ethnic-linguistic identities through media comic performances brings to the open previously silenced, sensitive issues for necessary public debate, also providing a rich field for research on contemporary sociolinguistic questions. The example explored here is a comparative illustration, presented at an academic seminar, between the data analyzed by Jaffe (2000), featuring comic bilingual performances in Corsica, and comic radio and television performances featuring a German-Brazilian character. First, the multi-site, multimedia academic seminar course is introduced. Next, four illustrative videos, shown during the seminar presentation as a counterpoint to Jaffe's data, are described, two of which spotlight D. Heda, a fictional German-Brazilian comic character. Further material is examined here – an interview with the radio journalist who created and performs D. Heda, in which he presents his radio program as validating German-Brazilian identities. This is briefly contrasted with comments by a course participant arguing such humor is disparaging of German-Brazilians. Finally, in light of recent studies of similar heteroglossic public media comic performances, the tensions these performances may create between challenging and reinscribing normative ideologies are discussed.

KEYWORDS: German-Brazilian. Humor. Identity. Performance.

RESUMO: Este ensaio discute vozeamentos dúbios em atuações cômicas heteroglóssicas públicas midiáticas envolvendo identidades étnicas e linguísticas. O objetivo é exemplificar como a exposição de identidades étnico-linguísticas em atuações cômicas na mídia abre

¹ Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) professor and CNPq scholar. E-mail: pmgarcez@pq.cnpq.br

espaço para o necessário debate público acerca de questões delicadas, antes silenciadas, criando também um rico campo para a pauta de pesquisa contemporânea em Sociolinguística. O exemplo explorado no ensaio é a ilustração comparativa, feita em seminário acadêmico, entre atuações cômicas midiáticas bilíngues na Córsega, analisadas por Jaffe (2000), e em rádio e televisão no Brasil, figurando uma personagem teuto-brasileira. Primeiro, apresenta-se o seminário acadêmico multimídia multissituado em que isso teve lugar. Em seguida, são descritos quatro vídeos, mostrados durante o seminário em contraponto aos dados de Jaffe, dois dos quais destacam D. Heda, personagem fictícia cômica teuto-brasileira. Adicionalmente, examina-se aqui uma entrevista com o jornalista que criou e encena D. Heda, que afirma que seu programa de rádio legitima identidades teuto-brasileiras. Isso é brevemente contrastado com comentários de participante do seminário, que argumentou que esse humor deprecia os teuto-brasileiros. Finalmente, à luz de estudos recentes de atuações cômicas heteroglóssicas semelhantes, discutem-se as tensões que essas atuações podem criar como desafio ou reforço às ideologias de linguagem vigentes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Teuto-Brasileiro. Humor. Identidade. Atuação.

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This essay examines heteroglossic public media comic performances of ethnic and linguistic identities. The objective is to show an example of how airing ethnic-linguistic identities through media comic performances brings to the open previously silenced, sensitive issues for necessary public debate, also providing a rich field for research on contemporary sociolinguistic questions. The example explored here is a comparative illustration – proposed during a multi-site, multimedia academic seminar presentation of Jaffe (2000) – between the comic bilingual performances in Corsica analyzed in that article, and more recent public media comic radio and television performances featuring a German-Brazilian character. I argue, with Jaffe (2000), that “bilingual comic performance valorizes hybrid identities,” taking “this public expression of mixed codes and identities to be in itself a form of legitimation” (p.40). However, I also acknowledge and discuss “the frequent ambiguity of heteroglossic speech,” and the fact that “variously positioned performers and audiences may key and interpret the relationship of performed figures to dominant stereotypes — as celebratory, humorous, realistic, ironic, critical, risqué, or offensive” (JAFJE, KOVEN, PERRINO, & VIGOUROUX, 2015b, p.136). After presenting the multimedia setting in which the discussion of Jaffe (2000) took place, I describe two videos shown during the seminar that spotlight a fictional German-Brazilian comic character. Further material is examined here – an interview with the radio journalist who created and performs D. Heda, in which he explains the character’s success and argues his radio program validates German-Brazilian identities. This is contrasted with comments by a seminar participant arguing such humor is disparaging of German-Brazilians. Finally, in light of recent studies of similar

heteroglossic public media comic performances, the tensions these performances may create between challenging and reinscribing normative ideologies are discussed.

A PREPARATORY COURSE FOR THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDIES IN LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY IN EARLY 2015

During the first semester of 2015, a diverse group of scholars and graduate students in Applied Linguistics gathered over the internet to discuss readings as part of a preparatory course for a School of Advanced Studies in Language and Society on the theme of “Mobility at Large.”² This large group was composed of subgroups who were copresent at different university settings throughout Brazil, and in direct contact over Skype. The Skype meetings were broadcast online on Wikispaces to additional groups or individual scholars and graduate students. These participants could post messages during the broadcast, but had no direct access to the core groups’ discussions on Skype.

The preparatory course, generally titled “the sociolinguistics of mobility,” had three modules. The second module, “Language policy, multilingualism and identities,” led by Marilda Cavalcanti, Terezinha Maher, and myself, covered 10 papers by Alexandra Jaffe. In the first meeting, my colleagues opened the discussions with background information on Corsica through video footage featuring the island and its cultural specificity. In the second meeting, I summarized Jaffe (2000), which “describes how comedians and radio professionals in Corsica draw on a bilingual linguistic and metalinguistic cultural repertoire” (p.39). By way of introducing the topic and the phenomena as also pertained to Brazilian settings, I showed publicly available footage of multilingual heteroglossic practices in the Brazilian South.

ILLUSTRATING HETEROGLOSSIC PUBLIC MEDIA COMIC PERFORMANCES IN SOUTH BRAZIL

Seminar participants were shown four videos. First they watched a two-minute section of a clip of unused footage from *Walachai*, a documentary film about a German-speaking community near Porto Alegre. In the clip, a local resident talks about her linguistic repertoire and sings a song she learned in school with rhymes interspersing Portuguese and German words.³ Next participants watched a video clip published in the online version of *Zero Hora*,⁴ a large circulation daily newspaper, just prior to the beginning of the 2014 World Cup of soccer. This features radio programs in two small towns in the state of Rio Grande do Sul broadcast in locally spoken varieties of German (Westphalian) and Italian (Venitian).⁵ In

² A detailed description of this complex multimedia academic undertaking is provided by Gargioni et al (this volume), who analyze the same event I report on and discuss here.

³ The section of the clip can be seen at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=ltYEmCazD8o#t=301. A trailer of the documentary is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFdH2Jai37w>. The variety of German in Walachai is also spoken throughout southern and center-western Brazilian communities settled by descendants of immigrants who came to Brazil in the 19th century from the southwest of today’s Germany.

⁴ The clip can be found at <http://zh.clicrbs.com.br/rs/esportes/copa-2014/noticia/2014/06/radios-do-rs-analisam-jogos-da-copa-em-dialetos-europeus-4523951.html> about halfway down the page.

⁵ See Perrino (2013), for recent interactions between speakers in Venitian-speaking communities in Brazil and in Italy.

the Italian language program, one of the two male speakers impersonates a comic character, an old lady listener calling in the program, echoing some of the data analyzed in Jaffe (2000).

This set the stage for the third and fourth pieces of footage showcasing another female comic character performed by a male comedian on the radio. Like the sketches in which a male comedian performs the character of an older woman from Ajaccio, which Jaffe (2000) reported were “a regular feature on the regional radio station, RCFM ... a ‘radio de proximite’ (a radio of intimacy) ... [that] has a strong regional and local orientation in its programming” (p.45), D. Heda Hesmitelz is a fictional comic character of an energetic German-ethnic peasant lady portrayed by radio journalist Luiz Roberto Closs. D. Heda appears in “Show da Véia” (The old lady’s show) at Rádio Viva, a radio station in Montenegro, a town of about 50,000 inhabitants, settled by German immigrants in the mid 1850s.

Seminar participants were thus introduced to D. Heda and her radio program through entextualizations of Closs’ radio performances in two different television programs produced by the main television network in southern Brazil. First⁶ D. Heda is showcased in *Patrola*, a weekly news magazine for teens and young adults. The host interviews D. Heda at the radio station studio from which “Show da Véia” is broadcast. She is dubbed “the star of Montenegro,” and then a rap-styled voiceover comes on as D. Heda sings “tem cuca com schmier” (there’s cake with jelly, where “cuca” and “schmier” are German borrowings widely used in Portuguese in this region). Always in character, she explains – in high pitch, German-accented non-standard Portuguese – how the program came to be, shows the food products she sells, the musical genres she plays in her program, and eventually sings the German-lyrics version of “Beijinho Doce” (Sweet Little Kiss) a popular traditional Brazilian country music tune. She is also shown dancing with listeners who greet her in the town’s streets. When interviewed, they say they enjoy the program and the character, referring to her as “a véia” (the old lady), an informal alternate form of standard Portuguese “a velha”.

In the final illustrative piece, D. Heda visits *Bom Dia Rio Grande*, an early-morning daily news program.⁷ She is seen in full garb, clad in old-fashioned clothes, holding a basket of samples of “typically German-colonial” food products she brought the TV journalists to promote her business. Obliging the anchorwoman’s request, D. Heda pronounces her last name and says she is 78. The anchorwoman tells everyone D. Heda is very modern and has her own Twitter account, laughingly enunciating the words in D. Heda’s Twitter profile – “logutora de radio e acrigultora” (radio speaker and farmer), as the viewer gets a chance to read the misspellings of “locutora” and “agricultora,” mirroring the common consonantal voicing/devoicing that characterizes the speech of German bilinguals when speaking Portuguese.⁸ The journalists join in and support the comic performance by laughing and by making relevant other aspects of D. Heda’s non-standard speech. In the follow-up conversation, they draw attention to her use of the archaic form “dezaioito” instead of “dezoito” (eighteen), the confusion between “inflamação” (inflammation) and “inflação” (inflation), and her pronunciation of Twitter as “tviter.” D. Heda does not acknowledge the laughing or the corrections, as she keeps using “dezaioito,” and takes the chance to say she uses Twitter with the kids, but the telephone to communicate with the older folks. Her TV hosts show appreciation for the food products she has brought them, and the sports commentator says she looks like and reminds him of his grandmother. All in all, we get a

⁶ This three-minute video can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSQ7BoUBX68>.

⁷ This five-minute clip can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcX_1Vjd_d4.

⁸ This is a crucial for the character to be recognized as ethnic German while speaking Portuguese. It is usually taken as evidence of the speaker’s identity as a speaker of German, which may not necessarily be the case. For a concise description of phonetic features indexing German-ness among speakers of Brazilian Portuguese, see Zilles and King (2005).

mixed sense of her portrayal as the stereotypical German-ethnic peasant now affirmed as modern and entrepreneurial.⁹

D. HEDA HESMITELZ: VALIDATING PEASANT GERMAN-ETHNIC/LINGUISTIC BRAZILIAN IDENTITIES

The sort of public bilingual comic media interactions and performances featured in the clips seemed to be doing similar work as the ones Jaffe (2000) analyzed to show that “media professionals and performers in these contexts manipulate, for creative purposes, conventional (dominant) ideologies of language in which languages are viewed as fixed and bounded codes which directly index equally bounded identities,” underscoring how “performers implicitly undercut this logic of clear-cut boundaries, by making use of the bilingual repertoire in ways that validate mixed language practices and identities” (p.39). Recently, Da Silva (2015) and Koven and Simões Marques (2015) have shown similar outcomes of amateur performances of “Portugueseness” in Canada and France.

As Jaffe (2000) pointed out, “all performance involves a heightened attention to audience reception” (p.42), and the performers

are, therefore, not just speaking ‘as themselves,’ but consciously inhabiting a role for which they must devise and monitor a voice. This voice must be recognizable to their audience; in other words, it must be conventional (stereotyped in some way) and linguistically indexed in conventional ways. (p. 42)

She adds that this “general principle of audience design” allows us to see clearly that the “performers’ language use is intelligible to their audience – and that it reflects (albeit in some exaggerated ways) everyday patterns of interaction and interpretive strategies,” which she then explores also by means of interviews with radio listeners, making a distinction between aesthetic and analytical stances of Corsican listeners as they enjoyed the comic performances, but also displayed discomfort with the double voicings conveyed.

While we do not have such comparable data here, we turn instead to a recent TV interview with Luiz Roberto Closs, the radio journalist performing D. Heda, which affords us some on-record statements on how the journalist perceives his creation and some information on how at least some in his audience perceive his performances. Later, we turn to a course participant’s critical reaction to the footage, which generated further debate during the multimedia course meeting (Gargioni et al., this volume).

Jaffe (2000) argued that comedy routines that put mixed forms of language and culture on stage are “a form of legitimation [that] has a lot to do with the way that performances play to, define and create the audience’s shared experiences, knowledge and identities” (p.44). At least in part, this seems to be taking place in the various public comic media performances of ethnic/linguistic Brazilian identities, of which D. Heda is just one example in a trend that only began to be noticed in the past 10-15 years.¹⁰ And this is the stance taken by Closs, the radio journalist behind D. Heda Hesmitelz. In a webTV interview¹¹

⁹ See Auer, Arnhold and Bueno-Aniola (2005), Jung and Garcez (2007) and Jung (2009) for descriptions of such issues of language choice and linguistic heterogeneity as a resource for social categorization in German-speaking communities in the Brazilian South.

¹⁰ Da Silva (2015, p.195) reported having witnessed a public performance of Portuguese-Canadian ethnic comedy for the first time in 2007.

¹¹ The interview, posted on December 31, 2014 is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bp1Tv_vtpCU. It appeared in a webTV station that is part of the same news network that encompasses a local newspaper and Rádio Viva, the station broadcasting o “Show da Vêia”.

about his successful career in the radio, the character he refers to as his “godmother” is highlighted as a major accomplishment in his professional and personal trajectory overcoming prejudice as someone who came from a small community and made it as a radio personality. Early on in the interview (3’17”-3’22”) he says “Ouvi muito falar que lugar de alemão é na roça, não (.) frente o microfone” (I often heard it that a German [guy]’s place is in the farm fields, not in front of a microphone,” and then goes on to say that, in facing many challenges and prejudice, he turned his knowledge of German in his favor (3’31”-3’34”) “na época o início o meu diferencial é porque eu falo alemão” (at the time at first my competitive edge was that I speak German) as the radio station wanted to reach local people in small communities, “para aproximar¹² (.) a Rádio Viva (.) da comunidade do interior” (3’35”-3’37”) (to bring Radio Viva closer to the hinterland community).

The core of his 12-minute interview (4:20-11:00) is devoted to D. Heda, the character he was invited to create in 2007. He explains how he got inspiration from a combination of real women in his life – a cousin, a lady from his home town who comes to Montenegro to sell homemade food products, a cleaning lady working at the radio station – and molded D. Heda as an entrepreneur and a community leader.

When asked if he expected such positive repercussions, Closs narrates how the character became so popular s/he came to host a daily program of his/her own. He then speaks directly to the issue of recipient design before summarizing what the general aim of the program is in a section of the interview worth quoting at length:

6’30”-7’16”

as pessoas tinham vergonha de ligar para a rádio devido ao sota:que ... ah porque o locutor vai debochar de mim. (.) e na véia eles se sentem em casa, as pessoas ligam das mais variadas cidades e:: se sentem próximas daquela senhora que, que é agricultora, que é líder de comunidade, que vai na missa, (.) aquela católica fervorosa é: que canta em coral, (.) então é a:: (.) é aquela aproximação é a:: me sinto alguém importante (.) em tá fazendo aquele meio campo. (.) o:: o rádio tanto se moderniza (.) a área de informática, multi- internet (.) e a véia vem fazendo o sentido contrário (.) resgatando aquilo lá atrás, de das bandas virem tocar ao vivo toda sexta à noite no estúdio.

...

8’07-8’15”

a ideia principal do programa- do personagem: o resgate cultural (.) germânico.

6’30”-7’16”

people were embarrassed to call the program because of the accent (.) oh the speaker will make fun of me. (.) and with the Véia they feel at home, people call from from various towns a::nd they feel close to this lady who, who is a farmer, who’s a community leader, who goes to mass, (.) that fervent Catholic uh, who sings in the choir, (.) so it is the:: (.) it is that closeness it’s the: I feel someone important (.) in doing that midfield. (.) the:: the radio gets so modern (.) the information technology area, multi- internet (.) and the Véia has been going the opposite direction (.) rescuing that from the past, of bands coming to play live every Friday night at the studio.

...

8’07-8’15”

the main idea of the program- of the character (.) cultural rescuing (.) Germanic [cultural rescuing].

¹² Notice that his wording in “aproximar a Rádio Viva” comes close to Corsican RCFM’s slogan as a ‘radio de proximité’ (a radio of intimacy).

The interviewer then asks Closs to talk about the listeners who credit D. Heda to have cured their depression. Asked to explain how he manages to keep his daily program attractive, the performer highlights the variety of musical genres and activities at different days of the week.

From Closs' interview, we get only favorable assessments of the character's development, and the overall sense implied is that his key goal of affirming German-ethnic identities has been accomplished.

DIFFERENT AUDIENCES FOR D. HEDA AND CLOSS: COMIC DISCOURSE AS DISCRIMINATORY

The view we get from D. Heda's creator and performer is of a very positive response to his comic performances as he is able to build on "the 'esthetic' as both a kind of experience in which boundary-making is temporarily suspended, and a kind of participation framework that legitimizes the local, contextual forms of cultural capital owned by the audience" (JAFFE, 2000, p.44). Evidently, such comic performances involve other voicings that may become extremely complex beyond the original act of listening, as when an analytical stance is taken to assess the forms on which the performance is built. A Corsican listener

"described what was going on succinctly: 'I wish I could just laugh,' she said, 'but I can't.' ... she didn't just hear the sketch as a member of an "inside" audience; she heard it through someone else's ears. She heard the stigma that would have been (was still?) attached to the speaker of such mixed codes. (p. 49)

This might have also been the case of a member of our audience in the seminar, as evidenced in comments made in two consecutive online postings during the live screening of the presentation rendering Jaffe's text [see Gargioni et al. (this volume) for a detailed analysis of these comments and the discussion that ensued]. Speaking directly to the issue of complex double voicings in the construction of audiences of comic public performances is the commentator's assertions that the humorous public media performances shown in the videos disparaged minority language speakers, referred to as "immigrants" when, in fact, these are nth-generation descendants of immigrants.

As performers and their audiences constitute each other's esthetic and cultural authority in various ways, Jaffe (2000) has argued, the "ambiguity in the performer's relationship with the language forms" may construct audiences rather differently (p.57). In our case, layers of complexity are added once the videos were embedded in an academic performance with multiple audiences (see GARGIONI et al., this volume). "Like the performer, the audience could both identify and not identify" (JAFFE, 2000, p.50), especially when insider play with stereotypes used also by outsiders is involved.

The power of such comedy is also its danger: It is only the maintenance of frame that allows people to laugh at things that would be offensive if said by an outsider. The outsider's critical eye and voice are temporarily silenced in the performance, but they are never completely gone. (p. 50)

Indeed, the contrast between the Corsican comedian's stance towards the voice he animates and his listeners (who laugh, but can't *just* laugh when they evaluate such performances to an outsider) may apply to the episode in view here. Unlike Closs, who is producing an evaluation – to outsiders – of his performances as in insider, the seminar

participant commentator takes the position of an insider who is addressing outsiders about an evaluation produced by someone whom she takes to be also a complete outsider, and thus an illegitimate evaluator. Whereas Closs, like Jaffe's (2000) Corsican comedian, enjoys "a certain amount of 'role distance' from his character's voice (a distance that may be intensified by the fact he is a man playing a woman) ... he will not be personally implicated and identified with it" (p.49), the seminar participant seems implicated to the extent that she reprimands the presenter, as an outsider, for using the term "alemoa" when bringing the performances to the attention of others. She takes the epistemic high ground to explain it to him that the term is offensive.

The critical term, "alemoa", meaning "German" (noun or adjective, feminine, singular) is an alternate form of "alemã". The *Dicionário InFormal*, a webdictionary of Brazilian Portuguese, defines "alemoa" thus¹³:

Típica maneira sulista, principalmente no Rio Grande do sul e Santa Catarina de descrever mulheres ou meninas de pele e cabelos claros, geralmente descendentes de Alemães, Poloneses, Italianos, Holandeses e etc. Uma espécie de feminino informal de Alemão.

Typical southern way, mainly in Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, to describe women or girls of light skin and hair, generally the descendants of Germans, Poles, Italians, Dutch etc.. A sort of informal feminine form of alemão [German].

In my understanding, when referring to a woman of German descent, or to things German-Brazilian, "alemoa" contrasts with the clearly standard "alemã" referring to a German woman, or to things German in general, or from Germany in particular.

It is noteworthy that the masculine "alemão" has no alternate form, and thus speakers will disambiguate reference to a German-Brazilian male by referring to a European German male as "alemão da Alemanha" (German from Germany). The use of an alternate plural form "alemãos", however, is possible, as when Fischer (1996) explained his conception of the "alma alemoa" (German-Brazilian soul):

Os descendentes não são mais alemães e alemãs, mas alemãos e alemoas – e essa mudança já faz toda a diferença. (p. 113).

The descendants [of German immigrants] are no longer German men [alemães] and German women [alemãs], but German-Brazilian men [alemãos] and German-Brazilian women [alemoas] – and this change now makes all the difference.

This appeared in a book whose title – *Nós, os teuto-gaúchos* [We, the German-gaúchos] – is clear about the insider authorial voice of the +40 authors.

Of course, as with any term, and particularly so in the case of membership categorization, situated usage may trigger peculiar senses in different communities of practice and participation frameworks. While I do not perceive the term as demeaning and was surprised to hear it taken as derogatory, the seminar participant saw it as offensive. In my experience, it is used in affirmative self-reference by many German-Brazilian women, and is exchanged that way among interlocutors.

Whether or not the presenter should have been more rigorous and further preempted that hearing of his use of it during the course, the illustrative materials were taken up – then and now (GARGIONI et al., this volume), reinforcing the view that "responses to the performance may thus be the occasion for debate and tensions over the linguistic criteria of belonging" (JAFJE et al., 2015b, p.137).

¹³ Retrieved from <http://www.dicionarioinformal.com.br/alemoa/>.

UNRESOLVED TENSIONS IN COMPLEX PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES

As discussed above, comic heteroglossic performances stir multiple, simultaneous meanings, stances and identities, and this oftentimes results in double voicings echoing from sections of their audiences, raising tensions which, interestingly, may not always need to be resolved. Indeed, while

validating plural or hybrid identities because they constitute living examples of how a hybrid community of practice can recognize and celebrate itself. ... they allow participants the freedom to position themselves in various ways vis-à-vis the performance and the linguistic and cultural images it evokes. (JAFFE, 2000, p.57)

A group of researchers has recently re-examined the various ways “performers evoke, stage and implicitly evaluate recognizable voices from the larger social world, and how audiences respond to and display their recognition of performers’ aesthetically and politically charged staging of those voices” (JAFFE et al., 2015b, p.135); they show “how people use sets of semiotic resources to gradiently challenge and/or reinscribe normative ideologies and locally recognized, hierarchically organized identity categories” (p.135).

Da Silva (2015), for example, examined young amateur Portuguese-Canadian comedians performing sociolinguistic caricatures on YouTube that “playfully acknowledge, reproduce, and challenge ethnolinguistic stratification.” He argues that “the mocking performances are legitimized by the performers’ in-group status and reveal how a stigmatized variety of Azorean Portuguese and certain ethnolinguistic stereotypes can be reappropriated and reinforced relative to sociolinguistic hierarchies” (p.187). Similarly, Koven and Simões Marques (2015) analyzed how YouTube comedic performers in France spread “nonmodern images of Portugal” and “how participants bring these differently centered images of the nonmodern Other into dialogue with each Other, with different outcomes for variously positioned participants” (p.213).

As in the early paper by Jaffe (2000), in the reception of Closs’ performances and of the video clips shown as Brazilian illustrations of related phenomena, “whether and how particular performances ultimately transcend or reinscribe dominant stereotypes may remain indeterminate” (Jaffe et al., 2015b, p. 136), as they may range from celebratory to offensive. Da Silva (personal communication) considers the Portuguese-Canadian comedic performances he analyzed to be “**both** empowering **and** degrading. Empowering because they publicly recognize people, languages and identities that have long been marginalized and silenced. Degrading because these marginalized people, languages and identities are still seen as objects worth laughing at” (May 17, 2015). As Jaffe et al. (2015b) once again summarize:

the act of putting a heteroglossic performance on stage is itself resistant, insofar as it presents as legitimate forms of linguistic, and by extension, cultural hybridity. At the same time, the humorous key of all of these performances may mitigate those claims on legitimacy, because comedy can be bracketed off from the ‘real’ and the ‘serious’. Assessing resistance is also complicated because heteroglossic performances thematize the multiple, polycentric nature of both dominant and nondominant regimes of language. There is not always, therefore, a single, clearly identifiable target. (p. 137)

What all these case studies suggest, in my view, is that airing ethnic and linguistic identities through media comic performances brings to the open previously silenced, sensitive issues for necessary public debate, also providing a rich field for research on contemporary

sociolinguistic questions.

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