OTHERING PROCESSES AMONG BRAZILIAN INTERACTANTS ON THE INTERNET

CONSTRUÇÃO DA ALTERIDADE ENTRE BRASILEIROS NA INTERNET

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ABSTRACT: The article focuses on the process of othering as it is embodied in linguistic interactions among Brazilians on the Internet during the last decade, when socioeconomic mobility expanded the access and the adherence to practices involving digital technological resources by different social Brazilian groups. By othering, it means any linguistic-discursive action by which an individual or group is classified as “not one of us” (difference and strangeness). Considering that the construction of the Other is made up of social action; has an ideological component; and that an exercise of power is always present, the aim herewith is to show that othering processes in focused interactions instantiate overlaps, interceptions and tangencies between different space-temporal scales which constitute the contemporary Brazilian “reality”. Observational data from a research project carried out since 2005 about internet-mediated interactions among Brazilians will be used to illustrate the contentions put forth in this paper.
KEYWORDS: Othering. Interaction. Internet. Brazil.

RESUMO: O artigo focaliza a construção da alteridade do Outro por brasileiros em interações em língua nacional mediadas pela Internet na última década, quando a mobilidade socioeconômica ampliou o acesso e o uso de tecnologias digitais por diferentes grupos sociais. Por construção da alteridade, está-se compreendendo toda ação linguístico-discursiva de classificação do interlocutor (indivíduo ou grupo) como não sendo “um dos nossos” (diferença e estranhamento). Considerando que a construção do Outro é constitutiva das ações sociais, tem um componente ideológico e envolve sempre o exercício de poder, pretende-se mostrar que a construção da alteridade nas

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interações focalizadas instancia sobreposições, interseções e
tangenciamentos de diferentes escalas espaço-temporais que
constituem a “realidade” brasileira contemporânea. Dados produzidos
desde 2005 ao longo de uma pesquisa sobre interações mediadas pela
Internet serão utilizados para ilustrar as questões levantadas no artigo.
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A PALIMPSESTIC COUNTRY

(...) The Juiz de Fora Railway Museum presents the interactive exhibition Palimpsest (...): photographs of the same place at different times, projected and emerged out from the participant's silhouette moving in contact with the work, which will continuously reveal overlapping images. (ARCHDAILY, 29.5.2015; emphasis in original)

Observation and social interactional experience in spaces created by digital technologies related to the Internet have highlighted the relevance of contemporary discussions on theoretical and methodological models that elucidate the multidimensional, fragmented and dynamic character of the processes of textualization and re-con-textualization of linguistic-discursive and socio-semiotic resources in social interactions in general². And such discussions gain urgency in the applied field of language studies focused on social interaction in Brazil, a country known - both for the tourist industry and for the anthropological literature - as a "seething cauldron of races and cultures".

In the applied field, the complexity of the sociolinguistic and sociocultural context is an issue to be more productively grasped in order to contemplate the heterogeneity and fluidity that characterize contemporary Brazilian social life, particularly in its historical, political and ideological relations with the colonial past of slavery on the one hand, and, on

the other hand, the developmental and globalising nationalism of the last decades. A social life marked both by the post-colonial and globally peripheral condition of the country, hence by the multiplicity of mediations in access to translocal/global networks and flows (heterogeneities and internal asymmetries) not only in the economic and financial domain. The monoglot language ideologies (SILVERSTEIN, 1996) cultivated by the national State and its institutions, for example, have produced types and degrees of social inclusion/exclusion and of social mobility/immobility at national and supra-national scales, precariously mediated by language policies such as those studied by Szundy in this volume.

And the othering processes that draw sociolinguistic, cultural and political boundaries in the interactions among Brazilians in the Internet, are a privileged locus of observation of the operating modes of all these components in sociointeractional dynamics, as they give greater visibility to diverse, contradictory and conflicting forms of interweaving between language, temporality, spatiality and displacement, and, consequently, between language, positioning, roles and identities.

In this article, the focus is on interactions which has taken place since the early 2000s, when public policies of digital inclusion were announced and the popularization of the use of digital artifacts began in the country. The massive and progressive membership of historically marginalized social groups shifting towards social communication practices mediated by Internet technologies, especially by social media, has provided greater visibility to these processes. The examples illustrating the discussion below refer to previous research on metapragmatics, hypermedia literacy and sociointeractional building of roles and identities in social media³.

**A “GROTESQUE” INVASION**

Table 1 below contains data published recently by Internet Live Stats. It shows that since the early 2000s, the number of Brazilian net users is increasing significantly, especially in the period between 2000 and 2009, when the country became the fourth in the world in number of users. Even after the slowdown in 2010, 2013, 2014 and probably 2015, and despite the inequalities in access between and within socio-economic groups, and geographic areas⁴, Brazil remains well positioned in the ranking.

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⁴ According to research data from the "Internet Management Committee in Brazil" (Carta Capital magazine, 01.06.2016), the largest percentage of households with computers (59%) is in the Southeast, followed by the South (57%) and Midwest (48%). The lower percentages are in the North and Northeast: 33% and 37%, respectively. There is also an uneven distribution by social class: 98% of households with internet access are in class A; 82% in class B; 48% in class C; and 14% in the D and E classes. Another imbalance is between urban (54%) and rural (22%) areas, and of the 32.7 million households without access to the Web, mostly in the Southeast and Northeast, 25.5 million are in urban areas and in classes C (16.5 million) and D and E (13.2 million), with a household income of less than two minimum wages (22.9 million). "The high cost and lack of computers are the main reasons for users not connecting." (http://www.cartacapital.com.br/especiais/infraestrutura/O-desafio-da-inclusao-digital. (accessed 05 February 2016).
Regarding the profile of Internet users, a "Brazilian Media Research" published in 2014 by the Secretariat of Social Communication of the Presidency, with data from all over the country, pointed out that:

"In Brazil, the sociodemographic characteristics of the population have a great impact on Internet use, especially compared to other media. Income and education create a digital divide between who is a connected citizen and who is not. And generational or age data show that young people are more intensive users of new media. " (BRASIL, 2014, p. 49)

Regarding the distribution of users across networks and instant messaging exchange programs the survey results were as follows: Facebook (83%), Whatsapp (58%), YouTube (17%), Instagram (12%) and Google+ (8%). "Twitter, although popular among political elites and opinion makers, was mentioned by only 5% of respondents." (BRASIL, 2014, p. 50)

Although not focused in this study, the variables race and gender are significant in the mentioned sociodemographic characterisation of the Brazilian population, since blacks and mestizos are at the base of the Brazilian social pyramid, as well as female heads of household (MADSEN, 2013).

With respect to the income factor in the period between 2002 and 2011, the National Sample Survey (PNAD)\(^2\) showed a per capita growth income of 3.9% per year. A set of factors (economic stability, recovery of the minimum wage and social spending, and greater access to credit) resulted in a mass consumer boom and the rise of the so called new middle classes\(^6\), ie a significant increase of the population with the income classified as class C or

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\(^{6}\) Family income was the main criterion of classification. Since then this criterion has been discussed by Brazilian economists and sociologists concerned about other classification parameters. The main criticism they make is that social mobility is a multidimensional and much more complex phenomenon (POCHMANN, 2012; BARTELT, 2013).
"lower middle class" (SOUZA and LAMOUNIER, 2010), or "new working class" (SOUZA, 2010). From a statistical point of view, Neri (2011) points out that, shortly after the turn of the century, class C was the average income in society and was above the lower half and just below the richest 10%.

In fact, "Class C" was a generic expression adopted by the government and the mainstream media to refer to the main characters of a massive movement of popular appropriation of social networking since 2004 with the arrival of the former Orkut. But it actually comprises a wide range of socio-economic and socio-cultural profiles (many types and degrees of education, literacy and integration in the labor market, for example). Nevertheless, since the "invasion" of Orkut, the association between "Class C" and "populace" has been stabilized by the widespread use of the neologism "orkutização" (the noun and the verb) to describe the uncomfortable presence of the poorer classes, with their language and their "bizarre" practices on the Internet. More recently, the term acquired a more general sense: any disturbance of a given order by elements of the popular culture, especially the mood of the grotesque: "Unfortunately, the Gospel has been orkutized". And as a result of this process of indexicalization (SILVERSTEIN, 1976), the term became an icon in the form of a stamp (Figure 1), ie a semiotic resource of great mobility online and offline:

![Figure 1 - Iconic sign of popular appropriation of Internet technologies](image)

AND AN UNFRIENDLY REACTION

The "orkutization" of the Internet by the “populace” has caught the attention of journalists, teachers and linguists, especially in the years of greatest expansion of network usage, and hence of greater expansion of the presence of Brazilian Portuguese on the Internet. Then, the discussions on language uses in virtual spaces were multiplied, especially on the legitimacy of the less prestigious vernaculars that “invaded” the Internet and gained concreteness and visibility through instant written communication (SIGNORINI, 2013).

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7 "It is not necessary to change, makeup, much less misrepresent the Bible, leveling it to ridicule in an attempt to draw attention of the world." [http://www.ojovemeomundo.com/2014/01/orkutizaram-o-evangelho.html. Accessed: 05 January 2016]

8 According to Internet World Stats, Portuguese is the 5th. most used language on the internet since 2010 [http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm. Accessed: 05 February 2016]. And Brazil's Portuguese is more present on the Internet in this period, due to its number of users.
The lack of legitimacy associated to these vernaculars has catalysed a political and ideological (not purely linguistic) conflict between residents and newcomers to the Internet, shedding light on the historical correlation between (in)visibility and socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural status in Brazilian society. The question raised, explicitly or not, was: those who do not speak/write properly, according to the educated standards, can/should assume the role of legitimate/authorized interlocutors in the public sphere? And that is a question that had already been raised by the mainstream media concerned about the language of the president at the time (SIGNORINI, 2014). As he was admittedly a political representative of the newcomer groups to the internet, the issue of "Internet language" was immediately associated to the question of the President's language. But infiltrations and contagion between discourses that circulated on the subject at that time are beyond the scope of this text.

The focus here is on the socio-interactional construction of sociolinguistic othering and of socio-political otherness that since then have become frequent in blogs, forums, social networks and video channels in which network users are confronted with different understandings of what it means to properly use digital and socio-semiotic resources (not just language) in these new spaces of communication. As such, othering processes set up boundaries and relational positionalities and put the other at the border, they are processes of exclusion following the binary conventional logic of insider-outsider, central-peripheral, standard non-standard. Thus, they bring visibility to the socio-political mechanisms centered on monoglot language ideologies supporting a diglossic mentality (JAFFE, 1999; IRVINE & GAL, 2000; SILVERSTEIN, 2003) and a sociolinguistic order given as stable and hierarchical.

The excerpts presented below show the tone and terms of the discussion about "digital inclusion" and "language of the Internet" or "internetês". State agencies and mainstream media refer to the dissemination of internet technologies among the poorest through the expression "digital inclusion". Internet users and specialists (linguists, grammarians, writers and teachers) refer to the linguistic forms used in social networking through the term "language of the Internet" or through the neologism "internetês".

The first and second excerpts below are taken from the conclusion of a blog article posted in 2010. In the first excerpt, through analogy between digital inclusion and use of weapons, the author explains why he believes that the "included" - called "pawns" - are actually not legitimate and authorized partners in these new spaces of communication:

Excerpt 1:

“Yes, digital inclusion is shitty. It sucks, because in my opinion, they gave a license for a firearm to those who don’t know how to shoot. The guy can’t write properly, and instead of improving what he lacks, he gets a computer. It is like not knowing how to shoot and going out to buy a bazooca. Hell, you don’t even know how to shoot, why would you buy the most powerful weapon?
Think about that…”

In this excerpt, the construction of the otherness of the interlocutor in his new role has an exclusive character to the extent that the frontier that appeared to have been crossed in a common interactional space is redrawn through the reference to socio-cultural differences: the stereotype of the unskilled/uneducated worker (the "pawn") is confronted with the figure of the digital literate as one who has "more advanced knowledge" and is therefore the most qualified for the role of authorized user of the web. This is very well explained in another passage of the article, in which the target of the author's hostility is the more recently "included" - the "guys who fell into internet now".

Excerpt 2:

“I can help, I never refused to help anyone. But those who have advanced [digital?] knowledge cannot simply try to share "common sense." Yeah, this is the term: common sense. Guys who fell into internet now are lacking common sense. They are the consumerist people that run to acquiring any and every electronic item and sink deep into debt just to show their neighbor that now they have it and the other doesn’t.”

In this excerpt, it is interesting to note that the distinguishing feature has shifted to the individual level ("common sense"), as both the author and the "guys" have the same status as consumers subject to the same capitalist principle of consuming for status and distinction (BOURDIEU, 2008). However, the image chosen to illustrate the article makes the legitimacy accorded to the "crowd" consumer ambiguous: a homeless person, sitting with a computer in their lap and looking at the screen (Figure 2) indexes more directly the "mental shock" (blog name) caused by the "cursed digital inclusion" (article title) of a population that was excluded from consumer networks and communication in the public sphere until then. As in much of the criticism of the lack of "common sense", "taste", "education", legitimacy in short, of the newcomers, the projected chronotope here is the one with a segregationist past, thus nullifying all potentially shifting positions, roles, socio-interactional and socio-political identities promoted by the principle of inclusion. The author's statement - "I can help. I never refused to help anyone" - reaffirms the asymmetry in the interaction and strengthens the charity frame instead of both the class struggle frame and the inclusive action frame.

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10 According to the website Memey.com (http://memey.com/pictures/computers. Accessed 05 February 2016), this image circulated before on the internet as a meme. Thus, it most likely was not made in Brasil by the author of the article.

11 Echoing the concept initially developed by Bakhtin, chronotope “refers to the intrinsic blending of space and time in any event in the real world”. Specific chronotopes produce specific kinds of person, actions, meaning and value.” (BLOMMAERT, 2015, p.106; 109)
When the "mental shock" is catalysed by a linguistic difference, the erasure strategies of class logic (as well as the relationship of this logic with racial and gender stratification) mobilize a set of indexicals, be they linguistic and non-linguistic, which point to the beliefs and values of the graphocentric tradition and literate standards, as shown in the following journalist's blog post (Figure 3):

**Figure 3 - HOW I JUDGE YOU – BECAUSE I JUDGE YOU, YEAH!**
In the excerpt above, in English in the original, the opening statement opposing discrimination of race, creed, color or gender, is followed by a statement corroborating the idea that language usage indexes hierarchical positionalities in the socio-cultural and socio-political fields. In this sense, the construction of otherness and the demarcation of a frontier between identities and roles in the socio-interactional domain and in the wider socio-political field is based on linguistic ideologies that sustain the graphocentric model and the literate tradition represented by the figure of a teacher (or a secretary?) illustrated in the text. Insofar as style, the figure resembles textbook illustrations before the event of massification of free public education in the country, the chosen representation reinforces this association.

Regarding the voice of the "included" with less social power, when it appears in interaction with those who have occupied the space before the "inclusion", it is always stylized and directly or indirectly related to threat and violence, as in the picture below (Figure 4), a photo (or a remix?) extracted from the same journalist's blog, but without indication of place or date of production. As in previous examples, meaning is built in layers, through intersections between indexical structures from different scales: linguistic "slips" point to "slips" in behavior, which point in turn to practices of vandalism by the "guys" from the outskirts (indexed by the scribbled wall) in turn associated to space occupation by force, as in the favelas and "invasions" of land on the outskirts of large cities (indexed by the scribbled wall and the vernacular forms displayed on it), which are seen as pockets of resistance to the state power and a threat to the security of citizens and property rights (indexed by the content of the message on the wall: 1. We make mistakes; 2. Whoever complains; 3. We kick them out).

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12 This is the style of illustrations for children's handbook in the 1940-50s, reedited until early 1960. The illustration on the cover of Cartilha do Povo, edition n. 966 (Lourenço Filho, M. 1954. Edições Melhoramentos), is an interesting example, reproduced in: http://www.ufrgs.br/faced/extensao/memoria/cartilhas_imagens/Cartilha_do_povo_956.ed..jpg(Accessed 30 Mar, 2016)

13 Due to government reforms initiated in the 1960s, with the implementation of free public education at primary and secondary level throughout the country. In his study of the Brazilian public school in the twentieth century, Saviani (2004, s / n) states that: "In quantitative terms, (...) we found that the overall enrollment jumped from 2,238,773 students (primary school: 2,107, 617; high school: 108,305; higher education: 22,851) in 1933 to 44,708,589 (primar y: 35792554; medium: 6,968,531; higher: 1947504) in 1998 (BRAZIL, 2003, p 106). Considering that the country's population was around 40 million in 1933, rising to approximately 167 million in 1998, it can be concluded that while the total population quadrupled, the overall enrollment increased by nearly twenty times."

14 According to Rampton (1999) stylization is a range of grammatical, prosodic and segmental features that differentiate the language of the Other from the local vernacular variety, in this case, from the language of "educated" people. The persona projected in the stylized talk focused here reflects wither urban middle class stereotypes about young people from segregated urban zones.
One of the comments to a post, in a discussion about the supposed "hypocrisy" of those who are against the stigmatization of the new 'included' on the Internet, draws on indexical structures (SILVERSTEIN, 2003) and on semiotic processes of iconization (IRVINE & GAL, 2000), shedding light on a specific language ideological framework:

Excerpt 1:

I would like to see Mr. writer’s and his resonant (sic) readers’ day-to-day basis, when a "bro" comes up to you 'to crash your mind with a killer idea, you know?' and says 'I gonna show you crazy shit, that is slummy and then shows you a lacerated body, animals being cruelly killed, children being raped, etc ... just coz ‘the shit is crazy we’re mother fuckers, bro! you dig?" 15

In this excerpt, the process of othering is built through the youth stylization of the language in disadvantaged urban outskirts represented by the stereotypical character of the "mano" drug dealer ("baguio loko"), or burglar attacking ordinary people ("a" mano comes up to you"). As in the previous example, the projected chronotope is the contemporary segregated spaces, with its characters and stories taken from police reports. The images

supposedly posted on social media by these people ("and then it shows a torn body, animals being cruelly killed, children being raped, etc.") takes us back to the "orkutization" of the Internet, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, the issue in this case is not only to define boundaries between ways of using language, but also and foremost between worlds that do not stand for the same practices and the same values.

Interestingly, the relationship of these stylized verbal forms with the most prestigious expressions of popular culture such as the lyrics of rappers and funkers, for example, escapes the reasoning of the author in the comment above, insofar as a change of scale - from the local to the trans-local and global - puts indexical orders into play in conflict with the logic of peripherization (OTSUJI and PENNYCOOK, 2010) and relegation (COUPLAND, 2007), which supports his argument.

**BACK TO THE “SEETHING CAULDRON”**

As illustrated by the examples presented in the previous sections, the construction of the otherness of the "clueless people" who "invaded" the internet and the demarcation of socio-cultural and political-ideological boundaries between them and the former residents of the invaded areas presuppose and instantiate in the virtual world the tripartite ideological base of the modern nation-state: a unified language in a unified territory by means of a unified historical narrative. It is important to point out the invisibility of African slaves and indigenous peoples in the modern imagination, which makes racialization an invisible component in the cartographical order instantiated by the discussions above.

In this perspective, the issue of mobility of bodies, positions, identities, as well as material and symbolic resources is always subordinated to a relational dynamics characterized by a polarization vector: insider-outsider, central-peripheral, standard non-standard. It is also subordinated to the dynamics of a scalar cartography vertically oriented to a single center of power, institutionalized or not: unequal distribution of symbolic capital, such as status, distinction and authority, depending on positions in the hierarchical axis. The proper political issue of who can/should have a voice in the public sphere is linked to the same dynamics.

However, this cartography that has been perpetuated in postcolonial Brazil by the school literacy tradition and the regime of controlled access that characterizes it, is being confronted with cartographies structured according to models that surmise and instantiate heterogeneous and fluid synchronic settings of spacetime-language. Accordingly, language is viewed as a socio-semiotic resource and not as a unified system or grammar (JACQUEMET, 2005; BLOMMAERT, 2013; BLOMMAERT, WESTINEN and LEPPÄNEN, 2015). The mobility factor is thus an important feature of such models as they contemplate the more complex dynamics of micro actions and communication networks, which are not influenced by a single power center. In fact, mobility is a feature of the dynamics of the border (as opposed to territory or national frontier line) understood as scattered and diffused space-time which continually produces differences and shifts, just like the dynamics of a "seething cauldron":

A border today is dominantly understood as a belief in the presence and continuity of a spatially binding power, which is objectified in everyday sociopolitical practices. Put differently, the attention has moved away from the study of the evolution and changes of the territorial line to borders seen as differentiators of socially constructed mindscapes, identities and meanings. (HOUTUM, 2012, p.406)
Othering processes in the interactions focused above, reveal the tensions generated by the historical co-habitation between these two dynamics: that of the modern nation-state (legitimacy credited to a linguistic standard, to a territorially circumscribed space, to a national identity); and that of the border as a domain implicated in the networking configurations, so without previously defined contours and continuously in a reconfiguration process (unstable and dynamic communication networks, multiplicity and heterogeneity of socio-semiotic resources (including language) and of identity development processes). In this sense, one could say that, just as the interactive exhibition "Palimpsest" proposes, quickly described by the epigraph at the beginning of a previous section, the displacement of social actors, including the analyst, is what will reveal the "Brazilian realities" that are being (re) built every time.

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