

## LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF FOREIGNER TALK IN BRAZILIAN LITERATURE

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This article<sup>1</sup> presents a preliminary analysis of some of the ways Brazilian novelists have depicted *foreigner talk* (Clyne 1981; Page 1988, Ch. 3), that is, the speech of characters that reflect the presence of foreigners -as immigrants, invaders, mercenaries, merchants, or exiles- in Brazilian society (see Leitão 1985).

Foreign characters provide a connection to the world beyond national boundaries and serve as a mouthpiece for an outside opinion. By contrasting with the standard language, foreigner talk underscores the alien condition. Its stylistic effectiveness, however, depends on readers' ability to understand it without having to laboriously decipher it as a code. This condition encourages the author to exercise restraint in the use of the foreign language to obtain the desired effect, sometimes stereotypically (Traugott and Pratt 1980:338 ff.), without compromising intelligibility or overtaxing the reader.

The degree of intelligibility of the foreign language involved is a crucial factor in the representation of foreigner talk as a character's definitory feature. Phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical similarity to Portuguese makes Spanish readily understood by most Brazilian readers. Italian runs a close second, not only because of linguistic resemblance, but also because the presence of an extensive Italian-Brazilian community has traditionally fostered familiarity with the language<sup>2</sup>.

Held as an international medium of high culture by the intelligentsia and the upper classes, French, though not an immigrant language, was a mandatory high school subject until the early sixties<sup>3</sup> and many educated readers in their fifties and older can be counted on to understand it. As to English, which has largely displaced French as an international language, it is sufficiently present -at school, in movies, and even some of the media- to ensure a degree of familiarity. German, in turn, is

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<sup>1</sup> This article represents a small part of a project on the literary representation of nonstandard language. Theoretical considerations, as well as some of the examples used here, appear in Azevedo 1991, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> That community used to support a robust daily press. Ribeiro (1985:203) states that in 1910 the Italian language daily *Fanfulla*, published in the city of São Paulo, reached fifteen thousand copies, while the daily *O Estado de São Paulo* reached twenty thousand.

<sup>3</sup> About French language and culture in Brazil, see Freyre 1970 (Chs. Four and Five) and Needell 1987.

studied by few people, and intelligibility is unlikely for most readers outside limited areas of German immigration in the South of Brazil. Other immigrant languages, such as Arabic or Japanese, are virtually unintelligible outside immigrant communities (which tend to assimilate rapidly, linguistically and otherwise)<sup>1</sup>.

The simplest -if make-believe- way of indicating foreigner talk consists simply in informing readers that a foreign language is being used, thus inviting them to suspend disbelief and to interpret a passage in Portuguese as if it were spoken in another language:

(1) "-Ema, podes trazer a sopa- ordenou Frau Marta, em alemão [...]. Em família, os Woiffs falavam sempre alemão." (Moog 1987:91)

Occasional interjections reinforce this convention, as in (2), and in (3) a few words remind us that an Austrian character is speaking French to his Brazilian host:

(2) "*Mein Gott!* E onde estao os seus sentimentos cristãos, Marta?- indagou Stahl" (Moog 1987:112)

(3) "*Mon cher Doktor*, só se pode apreciar devidamente Bach depois dos quarenta anos." (Veríssimo 1951:353)

The same approach serves to indicate a foreign accent:

(4) "Bateu à porta da casa do vigário [...] e perguntou-lhe se podiam velar os mortos na Matriz. -Não- respondeu o sacerdote. -Não me meto em política.- Era um padre de origem alemã e falava com um sotaque carregadíssimo." (Veríssimo 1961, 2:339-340)

While a foreign accent and broken Portuguese, although caricaturesque, may be acceptable in minor characters, major characters must not court ridicule. Thus, fluency in Portuguese may reflect the importance of a character's role and an account of how it was achieved may be provided, as in the case of an exiled czarist officer:

(5) "Toda a minha formação era aristocrática... Saí da Turquia para os Estados Unidos. Cheguei a ser ferroviário. Dava lições também. Falava o inglês. [...] Desci num cargueiro. [...] Um dia cheguei a Santos. E decidi ficar. [...] Tomei um professor. Aprendi a língua daqui como aprendi o inglês. Os russos têm facilidade." (Andrade 1974b:81)

On the other hand, since a character's foreignness is crucial to his role, a balance is achieved by marking their Portuguese with a few alien touches. This is the case of Dr. Winter, a German physician whose opinions are often at variance with those of nineteenth century Brazilians:

<sup>1</sup> Some immigration figures until 1973 are: Italians, 1,533,092; Germans, 201,876; Japanese, 249,177. In 1988 native or Japanese-descent population was estimated at 550,000, or 2.3% of the population. (Source: *Almanaque Abril 1988*. São Paulo: Editora Abril.) Other immigrant groups are too small to have a noticeable linguistic presence.

(6) "-Latinos os homens desta província? [...] *Ach mein lieber Gott!* Acha então o doutor que os gaúchos descendem dos romanos?" (Veríssimo 1949:375)

(7) "*Meine liebe Fräulein!* - exclamou [...] -O que vosmecê acaba de dizer é uma inverdade científica." (Veríssimo 1949:361)

Another make-believe practice makes Portuguese stand for a foreign language. In a novel located in Washington, D.C., it is understood that Portuguese, when used in soliloquies or dialogues, may stand for either Spanish or English, depending on who is speaking. Again, occasional foreign expressions remind the reader of this convention:

(8) "-*Bueno*, nos encontramos em casa às cinco e meia." (Veríssimo 1966 EMB 805)

Beyond such pretended talk, there is an ample spectrum of possibilities, from a hint of an accent to whole sentences in a foreign language, with or without glosses.

A major contribution of foreigner talk consists in imparting authenticity to a setting. For example, in the novel *Saga* (Veríssimo 1966 SAG)<sup>1</sup>, we find a variety of quotations from the fictitious diary of a Brazilian in the Spanish Civil War. A Spanish captain is described as saying: "*Gracias. [...] O seu nome?*" (17). A French border guard interrogates travellers: "- *Donde nació usted? -Y usted, amigo, de donde viene? Tout va très bien, madame la marquise... Allez!*" (19). Some Catalan children are described "...*cantando uma canção da qual me ficam estas palavras: Deus camina d'sclops a n'el fang [sic].*" (43)

Likewise, a sense of verisimilitude is created through direct quotes: "... seu nome fôra mencionado na página *Business* do magazine *Time* [...] *Gerald K. Ames (56) a handsome, youthful insurance executive... O Time era imparcial e frio, empregava sempre a palavra exata. Handsome... youthful. Tolice!*" (Veríssimo 1966 ESQ 734)

More subtly, foreigner talk may suggest the effect of a character on another. In the following un glossed dialogue, the reader is led to identify with the protagonist, Vasco, who does not understand German:

(9) "Anneliese [...] pôs-se de pé de repente. -*Gut-* disse para a companheira. -*Liebschaftet nur weiter; ich will diesen Wilden mit mir nehmen. Auf wiedersehen!*" (Veríssimo 1966 SOL 668-669)

Vasco's bewilderment, fully shared by readers who do not understand German, is dispelled when, having dragged him to her convertible, Anneliese

(10) "[...] bateu no banco ao seu lado e disse para Vasco: -*Vem.*" (Veríssimo 1966 SOL 669)

<sup>1</sup> Quotations from Veríssimo 1966 refer to the Aguilar edition and are coded as follows: CAM = *Caminhos Cruzados*; EMB = *O Senhor Embaixador*; ESQ = *Esquilos de Outono*; MUS = *Música ao Longe*; RES = *O Resto é Silêncio*; SAG = *Saga*; O Retrato; SOL = *Um Lugar ao Sol*

Clearly, foreigner talk may have complementary functions. A coarse expression or oath in the original adds to realism and makes it less objectionable, while -seemingly paradoxically- highlighting it:

(11) "Se a oposição vence a eleição, estamos *jodidos*."  
(Veríssimo 1966 EMB 808)

(12) "*Madonna!* - vociferou Aldo Borelli mentalmente."  
(Veríssimo 1966 EMB 808)

(13) "Mas uma coisa lhe peço, lhe exijo. Não fale na minha mãe, está ouvindo! Não diga que sou um pobre *hijo de una chingada*." (Veríssimo 1966 EMB 1066)

(14) "- Oh Monsenhorr Morère... *Maintenant je suis foutue. Il fallait me voir à vingt-ans!*" (Andrade 1974b:196-201)

A foreign accent has long been a staple feature of humor, as when English-accented Portuguese contributes to the comic characterization of an English merchant named Bolinbrog in *As Casadas Solteiras* (Penna 1956). Among the features used we find: (a) incorrect gender: *minha amorzinho* (416), *minha chapéu* (417); (b) incorrect form: *minhas comprimentas* (429); (c) faulty agreement: *suspensórias bordada* (416), *eu grita* (428); *eu quer quebra o nariz* (428). Humor is also underscored when a foreign character uses Spanish-accented English:

(15) "*Jau du iu du, míster Précidente?* repetiu, agora com uma voz grave que retumbou no quarto de banho"  
(Veríssimo 1966 EMB 773).

Likewise, eye spelling sets out the linguistic inadequacy of a social upstart:

(16) "[Doña Ninfa] se encontrava naquele grande empório [...] a perguntar *How much?*... *Jau môche?* [...] . Uma empregada da casa [...] perguntou-lhe [...] em inglês, em que podia servi-la. Doña Ninfa [...] respondeu com a frase habitual: *Ai éme jôz láquingue*." (Veríssimo 1966 EMB 805-806)

A light humorous touch underscores an accent conveyed through calques of foreign constructions, as in this portrayal of an American protestant minister:

(17) "Ele [God] é implacável! Deu a cada homem um cérebro para to... aah... pensar... para escolher entre o bem e o mal... E mandou os seus ministros por todo o téra... aaah... para pregar o Evangelho [...] Jesus passou quarenta dias sem comer [...] *but*... mas Satanás não sucedeu em tentando-o." (Veríssimo 1966 SOL 760)

Likewise, the characterization of an American businessman draws its strength from his English-laced Portuguese:

(18) "Senhor maior [...] Estamos num verdadeiro quandário [...] *Well*, sei que os meus chefes não podem aceitar as demandas exageradas de nossos operários. [...]"

Mas prometo fazer o meu melhor..." (Veríssimo 1971:202)

Such foreigner talk is delineated by elements such as the particle *to* (and its pseudo translation, *para*) introducing a Portuguese infinitive; calques such as *não sucedeu em tentando-o* for *did not succeed in tempting him* or *fazer o meu melhor* for *[to] do my best*; false cognates like *maior* 'bigger' used for *mayor* (Pg. *prefeito*); new coinages such as *quandário* (quandary). The illusion is completed by expletives such as *but*, *well*, *sorry*, as well as by *aaah* representing the hesitation marker pronounced as an elongated schwa [ə:].

Linguistic coexistence, though peaceful, may lead to language mixture, as in the speech of a Spaniard who has spent most of his life in Brazil:

(19) "Teu papá era um príncipe, um triunfador... Hoje... puff! Coração escangalhado, Don Getúlio deposto, o futuro incerto, una mierda! Te pergunto: que fêz êle de sua mocidade! Eh? Está todo perdido, pero não tens culpa, és um bom muchacho. Salud! [...] He visto Eduardo [...] é um homem inteiro. Pero é um stalinista, el imbécil! Nosotros los anarquistas não toleramos o comunismo. Te acordas do que fizeram os comunistas a los anarquistas em Barcelona durante a guerra civil! Atiraram contra nosotros, los traidores! [...] ese chico é um idiota, sigue aquele perro de Stalin..." [Veríssimo 1961 582-584]

Mixed speech appears both realistic and humorous in the following depiction of an Italian character in São Paulo in the twenties:

(20) "Parlo assim para facilitar. Non é para ofender. Primo o doutor pense bem. E poi me dê a sua resposta. Domani, dopo domani, na outra semana, quando quizer. Io resto à sua disposição. Ma pense bem!" (Alcântara Machado 1927:73-75).

The narrowness of the borderline between light humor and buffoonery is apparent in hackneyed depictions of a foreign accent. A French accent, for example, is featured with orthographic *e* for /ə/ instead of unstressed final /o/ or /a/ (*burre*, *inimigue*, *moele*); uvular /R/ is represented by *rr*, and the nasal diphthong /ãũ/ is replaced by *on*:

(21) "[French] O Dotor Fiusa? Um burre! É nosso inimigue! [...] Você pigou a moele! Non faça isso. [...] Os bolcheviste querr tirá os coisa da gente! Onde já se viu isse? Qui façan iguarr eu! Ganhê com sacrifice." (Andrade 1974b:196-201)

A caricaturesque intent is also apparent in the rendering of an Arabic accent in which initial /p/ is replaced by /b/ (*pronto*, *pra*, *pode*, *prejuízo*), and pre-stress /e/ is replaced by /a/ (*medalha*, *prejuízo*):

(22) "Madalha. Compra madalha! Bronto! [...] Dá duas dessa bra criança! Menos não bode. Tem brajuízo!" (Andrade 1974a:78)

A fake Japanese accent, in turn, is indicated by turning consonant clusters into sequences of consonant + vowel (*patricio* > *patirício*, *serviço* > *serevício*), by monophthongizing /*ũ* / into /*u* / (*munto*), and using non-Portuguese word order (*munto judia* for *judia muito*, *munto bebe* for *bebe muito*):

(23) "[Japanese] Patirício munto judia no serevício [...] Munto bebe Fusiko [...] Cõsul não dá orde munto non gosta [...] Quanto casa mais trobaia ainda." (Andrade 1974a:26)

Despite its widespread humorous use, foreigner talk may be used in all seriousness, as in the speech of an Argentine pimp (23) or that of a German political activist (24):

(24) "-La invitación es de Lola. Ella lhe gosta muito... - procurava falar português." (Amado 1979:48)

(25) "Os camarrados parecem greanços grandes. Hitler vai subirr muito alto e tem que desencadearr o guerra, para salvar o Alemanha, ele pensa. [...] Eu nong sapia nada. Só que breisava desstruirr a inimigo. Enton ia..." (Andrade 1974b:58-59)

Mixed speech may underscore the dramatic side of a down-and-out character who, despite his macaronic Italian-Portuguese idiolect, is not a fool:

(26) "... navio in tempesta e fui atravessare a plancha e perdeu o equilibrio... paf! e se fui na água e só apareceu no outro dia, morto, comido dos peixes e a filha dêle chorò e s'iscabelò (non vi, é claro, me contarom) e o pissoal da... da como se dice mesmo, Vasco? Ostia! dai coso... da balenera levò a bimba pro consule da Norovega e disserono: Sinhore consule, o babo desta piquena s'afogò e ela no tem mama e nessuno parente in terra nostra que é que vamo fazere? E o consule ficò com a bimba, podia fazere a cameriera, ajudá no servicio [...] Iso tudo si passava em Napole. Io non disse? Pois é ..." [Verfissimo 1966 SOL 846]

It is apparent that foreigner talk, by establishing a marked contrast with the standard Portuguese that defines the narrative medium, is intended not just to *signify* a denotative content but also -and perhaps principally- to *signal* (in the sense of Barthes' dichotomy (1965) between *signifier* and *signaler*) a fundamental opposition between foreign and national characters. Thus foreigner talk creates a two-tiered subuniverse of discourse that encompasses the cognitive level of the *signifié* and the intentional level of the *signalé*. It rarely, however, aims at a faithful reproduction of speech in a foreign language, or even at a precise duplication of foreign accent in Portuguese. Rather, it is implemented as a stylized re-creation of what the writer assumes to be the reader's perception of the foreign speech involved. Inasmuch as this assumption is rewarded by successful comprehension of a type of discourse that deviates considerably from the standard language, foreigner talk represents a valuable source of information on the perception of other languages shared by speakers of Brazilian Portuguese.

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## RESUM

### Aspectes lingüístics de la representació de la parla estrangera a la literatura brasilera

Aquest article analitza algunes de les maneres com hom representa la *parla forastera*, és a dir la parla de personatges estrangers, en la ficció brasilera. En contrastar amb el portuguès estàndar que defineix el medi narratiu, aquella representació no només *significa* un contingut denotatiu sinó que també *senyala* una oposició entre els personatges nacionals i els estrangers, els quals proporcionen una visió exterior de la societat brasilera. Com que es basa en una re-creació de la parla, l'anomenada *parla forastera* constitueix una font d'informació sobre la percepció comú que tenen de les llengües estrangeres els parlants del portuguès brasilier.

## SUMMARY

This article considers some of the ways in which the speech of foreign characters have been depicted in Brazilian fiction. By establishing a marked contrast with the standard Portuguese that defines the narrative medium, foreigner talk not only *signifies* a denotative content but also *signals* an opposition between national and foreign characters that provide an outside perspective on Brazilian society. Since foreigner talk relies on a stylized re-creation of speech, it is a source of information on the perception of other languages shared by speakers of Brazilian Portuguese.