

Lusocom: a Study of Communications Policies and Discourses in the Lusophone Space

(Lusocom: Estudo das Políticas de Comunicação e Discursos no Espaço Lusófono)

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Abstract

Lusophony is the highly intricate construct we intend to interrogate. It is a geo-linguistic space, that is, dispersed regions, countries and societies whose official language is Portuguese (Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, East-Timor, Guinea Bissau, Portugal, S. Tomé and Príncipe). It is also a sentiment, a memory of a common past, a shared culture and history. In addition to its symbolic patrimony, Lusophony integrates institutions attempting to expand the Portuguese language and inter-related forms of cultural expressions.

The project «Lusocom: a Study of Communications policies and discourses in the Lusophone Space» is about communications and the media; social representation, memory and identity; language policy and discourses. From the Communications Sciences perspective, the Lusophone Space seems to be a promising (though volatile) research object. In an increasingly globalised world, the Lusophone Space, in general, and CPLP (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa – Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries), in particular, have the potential to contribute to the development of alternative (and necessarily more complex) perspectives on the role media communications policies and discourses have played in the construction/reconstruction of the Lusophone identity and on how a common language might change the way «difference» is perceived. Furthermore, it can shed some light on contradictory globalising trends.

In order to try to accomplish this project, we have divided it into three inter-related tasks. The first one is «Networks in the Lusophone Space: Policies, Production and Distribution». Based on Political Economy, International Relations and Political Science, we intend to map the national and supra-national communications structures of these dispersed regions and we plan to examine the main media production centres and distribution flows. This infrastructural examination is fundamental to the concomitant analysis of media consumption in this space. Departing from Social Psychology and Cultural Studies, the task named «Social representations and identity Levels», aims to assess the relevance of representations and social stereotypes in the media for the development and reconfiguration of the Lusophone identity, taking into particular consideration the cultural and ethnic diversities of these geographically dispersed societies. The gradual results of the third task, «Language Policy and Discourses in the Lusophone Space: Uncertain Relations», will have an all encompassing effect in the development of the two previous tasks. This sub-project, informed by Cultural Studies, Social Semiotics, Speech Analysis and Linguistics, will problematise Lusophony as a discourse and as a «cosa mentale».

We believe that the Lusophone construct in its diversity will help us to demonstrate that solidarities resulting from a common language and from the miscegenation of memories and traditions have very concrete social, political and economic consequences.

Resumo

A Lusofonia é uma construção extraordinariamente complexa. É um espaço geo-linguístico, ou seja, um conjunto de regiões, países e sociedades dispersas, cuja língua oficial é o Português (Angola, Brasil, Cabo Verde, Guiné Bissau, Portugal, S. Tomé e Príncipe e Timor-Leste). É também um sentimento, a memória de um passado comum, uma cultura e uma história partilhadas. Para além do património simbólico, a Lusofonia integra instituições cujo objectivo é a expansão da língua portuguesa.

O projecto “Lusocom: estudo das políticas de comunicação e discursos no espaço lusófono” trata da comunicação e dos media; da representação social, memória e identidade; e das políticas da língua e discursos. Da perspectiva das Ciências da Comunicação, o Espaço Lusófono parece ser um objecto de investigação prometedora (embora volátil). Num mundo cada vez mais globalizado, o Espaço Lusófono, em geral, e a CPLP (Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa), em particular, têm o potencial para contribuir para o desenvolvimento de perspectivas alternativas (e necessariamente mais complexas) sobre o papel que os discursos e as políticas de comunicação para os media têm desempenhado na construção/reconstrução da identidade Lusófona e sobre a forma como uma língua comum poderá mudar a forma como a “diferença” é percebida. Para além disso, poderá esclarecer algumas tendências globalizantes contraditórias.

Para concretizar este projecto, concebemos três tarefas inter-relacionadas. A primeira chama-se “Redes no Espaço Lusófono: Políticas, Produção e Distribuição”. Tendo por referência a Economia Política, as Relações Internacionais e a Ciência Política, pretendemos mapear as estruturas de comunicação, nacionais e supra-nacionais, destas regiões e investigar os principais centros de produção e fluxos de distribuição de produtos mediáticos. Esta investigação infraestrutural é fundamental para a análise simultânea do consumo de produtos mediáticos neste Espaço. Partindo da Psicologia Social e dos Estudos Culturais, a tarefa “Representações sociais e níveis de identidade” pretende aferir a relevância das representações e dos estereótipos sociais veiculados pelos media para o desenvolvimento e reconfiguração da identidade Lusófona, dando especial atenção à diversidade cultural e étnica destas sociedades geograficamente dispersas. Os resultados graduais da terceira tarefa, “Políticas da Língua e Discursos no Espaço Lusófono: Relações Incertas” terão um efeito transversal no desenvolvimento das tarefas anteriores. Este sub-projecto, enquadrado pelos Estudos Culturais, pela Semiótica Social, pela Análise do Discurso e pela Linguística, vai problematizar a Lusofonia enquanto discurso e “cosa mentale”.

Acreditamos que a construção da Lusofonia na sua diversidade ajudar-nos-á a demonstrar que as solidariedades resultantes de uma língua comum e da miscigenação de memórias e tradições têm consequências sociais, políticas e económicas muito concretas.

3. The Objectives of the Lusocom Project

The Lusocom Project has the following objectives: i) to develop the existing researchers' network on Communications in the Lusophone Space; ii) to gather, systematise and diffuse information related with the national communications structures in Lusophone countries and the supra-national media structures and content; iii) to gather, systematise and diffuse information about Portuguese language policy (and its consequences) both at national and supra-national level, iv) to critically analyse the concept of Lusophony as a cultural area in an increasingly globalised world.

This project aims to clarify the relevance of a common language and culture in the communications structures, on the distribution of media content, on social representations and on the highly dynamic process of the Lusophone identity construction and reconstruction.

The long-term objectives of the Lusocom Project are related to our determination to contribute to the understanding of the media and other communications structures and contents in an increasingly globalised world. The complexity and diversity of the Lusophone cultural area seems to be a very promising way to interrogate and to problematise the relationship between media structures and products, on the one hand, and culture, understood as the symbolic infrastructure of a given society, on the other hand. In theoretical terms, it could be said that the Principal Investigator departs from the Political Economy and International Relations' perspectives but intends to go deeper in the attempt to articulate these bodies of research with the Cultural Studies tradition and with the literature on Linguistics Social Semiotics, and Social Psychology. The increasing complexification of communications structures demands for empirical and theoretical research on alternative spaces. Despite the obvious relevance of the East/West, North/South, Centre/periphery, rich/poor narratives, we are convinced that the Lusophone space will give us the opportunity of looking at cultural dynamics in a more sophisticated way.

2. Defining Lusophony – The State of the Art

Theoretically, it is quite difficult to locate this project within the existing literature. There is a profound and enlightening thinking on Globalization (Giddens, Castells, Hamelink, Mattelard, Robertson, Tomlinson, Sinclair), on Lusophony (Freyre, Lourenço, Venâncio, Castelo, Cunha), on media and communications in individual Lusophone countries (Bolão, Marques de Melo, Chaparro, Sousa, Pinto, Rebouças). But in our view there is a lack of research projects that clearly put forward the contradictory nature of specific cultural areas, the relationship between their development and the media, and their inter-connection with wider globalising trends.

Lusophony - in all its ambiguity and complexity – seems to be a very unique cultural area where «space» and «time» need to be carefully reflected upon. Having very concrete transnational communication and cultural realizations, the Lusophone Space offers us a multi-continental perspective and a dense relation between the present and the past. Lusophony has been recently «formalised» with the constitution of CPLP in 1996, but its deep understanding demands for a synchronic review since the 15th century overseas Portuguese expansion. It is unique due to its temporal and space differentiation and eclecticism.

Considering previous research developed by the teams' members, it is our working hypothesis that in this particular case language and cultural heritage (rather than economic interests) are at the basis of the development of Lusophone infrastructures. That is not to say that no economic and political interests are at stake. What we mean is that volatile non-material dimensions such as sentiments, dreams and a common plural imaginary have a fundamental role to play in the tense and unstable development of a language based community. Lusophony is a symbolic sphere (containing very distinct units) where Portuguese language media products and literature circulate with ease and are widely consumed.

This cultural space is interconnected with distinct economic regional interests and affiliations (e.g: Brazil and the Mercosur, Portugal and the EU, Mozambique and the Commonwealth, among others). The permanent cultural inter-action and the episodic economic ventures and benefits makes us seriously consider culture as a dynamic integrating force and not as a mere commodity. In the Lusophone case, the cultural area concept seems to be richer and more plural than broader theories can account for.

Taking into consideration the potential scale of the project, we will have to make choices between depth and extensiveness. We also have to make choices between different levels of analysis and between methodologies. This project incorporates more objective/institutional dimensions (e.g: mapping of actors, media flows, etc.) and the analysis of more abstract concepts such as representations, identity and culture. In any case, we believe that cultural and linguistic heritage has not been sufficiently exploited in previous communications Sciences' literature.

Therefore, and despite our own limitations, we hope that this project might contribute to the complexification of existing theory and to the solidification of a cultural area whose main discursive characteristic is the recognition of the difference. In a global and violent world, the dissemination of concepts and values related with the recognition of individuals, different ethnic groups and societies might slowly (but consistently) contribute to a culture of peace and tolerance.

3. One Project divided into three inter-related tasks

3.1 Networks in the Lusophone Space: Policies, Production and Distribution

The media have been an awareness catalyst for Lusophone issues well before the formal constitution of the Lusophone Community (CPLP) in 1996. Even in periods of more tense political/diplomatic relations between Lusophone countries, the media always maintained what could be described as a minimum connection. Information has traditionally circulated with ease in this space through news agencies, newspapers, radio and television international broadcasts. Films, series, sports programmes, and products such as *telenovelas*, faced no cultural resistance, being well received and successful in all Lusophone countries. Brazil and Portugal clearly are the main producers of information and entertainment content but the content flow is far from being unidirectional. Following the formalisation of the Lusophone Community, in 1996, a number of initiatives were taken in order to increment the existing relations between these countries in the media/communications sector. The media and communications are naturally perceived as an important tool to develop the Lusophone cultural area, and governments, institutions, companies and individuals are attempting to construct a meaningful community in this sphere. Initiatives are indeed very diverse, the most notorious being related to training and exchange of journalistic and entertainment content.

Considering this context and paying attention to existing literature on Lusophone countries' media and communications, and on Policy Networks, this task intends to identify and to characterise communications Policies networks in the Lusophone space. We want to examine the most relevant political, economic, cultural and professional communications actors which are involved in communications policy, both at national and supra-national level. Without the analysis of the power structure of these actors and its relative position in the communications policy network it is – in our view – very difficult to understand decisions and non-decisions taken by the multiplicity of public and private actors involved in the communications sphere. These actors have an impact on the communications national and international structures and products and, therefore, they contribute to the reconfiguration the plural and diversified Lusophone identity. In addition to communications policy-making, it is this task's objective to look at the main trends in media production and distribution in the Lusophone Space.

With this task, we aim to study communications policies and its impact in media production and distribution in the Lusophone cultural area. Departing from the work previously developed by this team's investigators, we intend to reorganize existing literature on the media and communications in CPLP countries and to explore the inter-connections between national and supra-national communications policies and their consequences in the production and import/export of media contents. We intend to map communications' power structures, to study the main communications actors (such as the Brazilian Globo and the Portuguese Portugal

Telecom and RTP) and the most crucial distribution systems in the Lusophone Space. We will pay attention to both information and entertainment products.

In the entertainment sphere, we will try to understand how Brazilian telenovelas have circulated in this area, being watched – along with football and news bulletins – in all Lusophone countries. In terms of information, we will look at the development of the development of international TV channels in Portuguese (e.g. RTPÁfrica and RTPInternacional).

It is also very relevant to the comprehension of the existing communications structures in Lusophone countries, to look at the most recent cooperation developments within the CPLP context. In the television sector, public service television operators from Angola (TPA), Cape Verde (TNCV), Mozambique (TVM), Portugal (RTP), S. Tomé and Príncipe (TVS) plus several Brazilian television stations (TV Cultura, TV Abril, TV Educativa) decided to create a so-called 'common interests association'. The association of 'Portuguese Language Televisions' aims to develop synergies in terms of production and distribution of television products, to improve telecommunications between these countries, and to develop training programmes for television professionals. The association is very supportive of the existing Portuguese international television channels: RTPÁfrica and RTPInternacional. National news agencies from all Lusophone countries (ANGOP from Angola, RADIOBRAS from Brazil, CABOPRESS from Cape Verde, ANG from Guinea-Bissau, AIM from Mozambique, LUSA from Portugal, and STPPRESS from S. Tomé and Príncipe) have also associated themselves in an Alliance of Portuguese Language News Agencies. This alliance was established to implement a free flow of information between these news agencies, to promote technical assistance and cooperation, to improve the existing telecommunications networks and to prepare common data banks.

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3.2 Social Representations and Identity Levels

The aim of this sub-project is to assess the relevance of representations and social stereotypes in the media for the development and reconfiguration of the Lusophone identity. The main goal of this task is therefore to try to understand the construction and development of identities in the Portuguese-speaking countries (CPLP), considering their cultural and ethnic diversities. It is our intention to study the construction of individual, collective and multiple identities, their interrelations, and the consequences for the promotion of inclusive and active citizenship. This approach should take into account the history of the relationship among the countries, the actual political relations, the dynamics of migrations, gender related issues, the ongoing societal and demographic changes as well as the impact of the globalisation process.

We will pay special attention to the role of the media in the construction of social representations about national and ethnic groups. We will focus on the content of the audiovisual programmes (such as telenovelas, miniseries and films) which are widely watched in CPLP countries and we will also look at the internet sites promoting Lusophone culture and identity.

A comparative and multidisciplinary approach is of particular relevance. In the comparative dimension, we will consider data from Portuguese-speaking countries in different continents (Portugal, Brazil, Mozambique and East Timor). Our objective is to analyse how people develop their identities within highly differentiated cultures and ethnicities in an increasingly globalised world. If this task is to work we must bring together different disciplines which have paid attention to identity and citizenship : social psychology, media and cultural studies.

Within the wider framework of the Lusophone project, this task is also committed to research that supports the development of socially inclusive policies in Portuguese-speaking countries, policies that have the potential to contribute to the development of an informed, active and participating citizenship, and consequently to civic and social tolerance of all forms of diversity.

With this task, we intend to analyse media discourse on issues related to Lusophone identity in order to understand what are the dominant traits in the discursive (re)construction of Lusophone identity and what social and political consequences that may have. We will analyse representations on national groups, ethnic groups and other social minorities in media content which is distributed and consumed in the Lusophone Space. We will pay attention to both information and entertainment. We also intend to study the social representations about the history of the relationship between the Lusophone countries, addressing in particular representations of the Portuguese Discoveries, colonialism, colonial war, decolonization and postcolonial issues. Indeed, we will examine representations about historical events perceived as the most relevant to in the common history of these countries. We will analyse the present day representations of different social groups in each country about these issues, using extensive surveys and also focus groups. We aim to develop a deeper comprehension of the most hegemonic and the polemical representations, the role of social identity and the collective emotions that controversial historical events might bring to the surface. We also intend to analyse conditions for resistance and contestation to mainstream discourses. Finally, we will focus on the implications of these collective representations and emotions on the current relations between Portugal Portugal and the other Lusophone countries, and specifically on negotiations within the CPLP scope.

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3.3 Language Policy and Discourses in the Lusophone Space: Uncertain Relations

Involving researchers from varied backgrounds and with differing personal interests, this task is centred on the communicative relations within the Lusophone space. As it would be natural with such a heterogeneous space, research must encompass language politics relations, and those resulting from particular forms of expression, like literature and media coverage.

The task is divided into three main routes. The first one, will centre its efforts on the analysis of the literary field, with particular emphasis being put on instances of Lusophone expression. The main interest is not only to perceive discursive differences and particularities but also to read them in relation to particular periods. The second one will be centred on a more institutional approach, the politics of language, crossing stipulations with effective repercussions on the daily life of Portuguese speakers. The debate will revolve around the idea of Lusophony itself and cultural and political strategy, confronting definitions and decisions with its eventual implementation and incorporating reflections from mainstream contemporaneous concerns, like globalisation, multiculturalism or interculturality.

The third and final route intends to focus on Lusophony as discourse, representing an anchoring point for both the former ones. To Literature and Language Politics, this third route will add, with an illustrative rather than systematic form, the analysis of specific media registers, namely in the fields of cinematographic and television fiction. Present day discourses on Lusophony will be confronted with past ones (Luso-tropicalism, for instance), departing from the observation of the role played by the media in the promotion of some hiper-identitary discourses.

This task is therefore about the cultural and social relationships based on Portuguese language communications processes taking place within the geo-political Lusophone space. With this task we intend to examine the role of the Portuguese language itself in the construction of personal, cultural, and social identity of the individual in Lusophone countries. As we analyse different discourses we intend:

- to depart from a study of the relations and linkages between the media of the chosen countries (Portugal, Brazil, East Timor and Mozambique) to outline a linguistic Lusophone route;
- to establish a critically descriptive panel of the several Portuguese norms used in the media;

- to observe and catalogue possible associations between the 'Lusophone discourse' and the formation of national consciousness, and
- to examine the linguistic policies in four particular cases: the European context (Portugal), the South American context (Brazil), the African context (Mozambique), and the Asian context (East Timor).

Transcontinental societies based on historical colonial relationships are themselves involved in different forms of supra-national organizations. Brazil, for example, has joined Hispanic Latin-American states in Mercosur. Francophone and Anglophone countries in Africa are part of other international African alliances. Religion has also relevantly contributed to the development of different sorts of supra-national solidarities in what can be called, for instance, the «Catholic World» or the «Muslim World».

In this highly complex international context, it is becoming increasingly difficult for states, whose sovereignty is in constant defiance, to harmonize multiple and differentiated affiliations. These international alliances and connections can be related to a common history and/or to a shared vision of the future. The understanding of these intricate supra-national economic, social, cultural and linguistic relationships, affiliations and identities are, in our view, one of the most challenging tasks that governments and societies are faced with in the present day. Therefore, talent and creativity must be mobilized in order to serve the recognition of the difference and, consequently, a culture of peace and tolerance. Social scientists cannot ignore the urgency of a deeper understanding of these highly dynamic international configurations.

Based on the CPLP (*Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa*) experience in terms of migrations, language policy, literature and the media, we intend to gather elements which might (partially at least) demonstrate that culture and economic/social wellbeing are the end product of miscegenation. The short CPLP experience (it formally started in 1996), has shown that the convergence of countries sharing cultural solidarities has contributed to the solidification of peace and development. Horizontal solidarities (those resulting from a common language and from the miscegenation of memories and traditions) are a crucial dimension to the comprehension of the globalization of dependencies. CPLP has the potential to contribute to our understanding of the articulation between national political powers (based on territories) and the highly differentiated forms of globalization, from the internationalization of capitalism to the development (though incipient) of a global citizenship and social movements. When making choices regarding their aggregations, CPLP countries are at times linked and solidary with national and supra-national entities with contradictory interests. However, it is likely that highly complex relations (which include conjunctural contradictory interests) have more potential to develop non-violent responses to eventual problems. When there is no linearity in the nature of relations nor stability regarding common interests, the gradual development of a community such as CPLP appears to ensure settlements based on dialogue. This task will try to map the complexities of these dense relations.

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Final Remarks

Taking into consideration the main objectives of the project, we are concerned with a supra-level of analysis and our research object is an international (and multi-geographical) cultural area. We hope to contribute to the mutual development of research which eventually might support the planning and the implementation of socially inclusive policies. We believe that such policies – based on fundamental human rights – are the way forward towards the sustained development of the Lusophone space.

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