

Abstract: Departing from the observation that the blogosphere is nowadays a powerful communication space between Lusophone citizens - users of Portuguese language constitute the fifth largest language community on the Internet (Macedo, Martins & Macedo, 2010) - this paper presents some findings of a study that sought to examine the contents of fifteen blogs, Brazilian Mozambican and Portuguese, in relation to representations of the Lusophony.

The results show that many aspects of the Portuguese colonial empire long history, from its achievements to its vicissitudes, are reminded, communicated and discussed in order to justify points of view, whether favorable or unfavorable, about the meaning of a Lusophone community. Regarding it as a kind of imperial extension, both its advocates (usually nostalgic Portuguese on their supposedly glorious historical past), as its detractors (mostly Africans and Brazilians who preserve the memory of a past of domination), tend to produce simplified representations that result in tensions and misunderstandings. Consequently, there is confusion between the nowadays geo-cultural community of Lusophony and its own past. This confusion is connected with the crossing of the independent present of those who speak, think and feel in Portuguese with the colonial past, which led them to the meeting of their cultures. In fact, on the blogosphere, lusophony is emphasized, on one hand, as a Portuguese colonial empire heritage and, on the other hand, as an unequivocal proof of its radical disappearance. It is concluded that such a diversity of representations can turn this “imagined community” into a “imaginative community.”

Keywords: Lusophony; Blogosphere; “Imagined Community”; “Imaginative Community”.

Introduction: Blogosphere and cultural transformations

The new communicational order, imposed by the extensive use of information and communication technologies (ICT), has determined important transformations in the modes of cultural expression in our contemporary world. In this regard, Webster (2006) notes that at no other time in history circulated as high amount of information as in these days. In the author’s opinion, this phenomenon was due to the media diversification and the use of ICT, which become accessible all kinds of information to a larger part of citizens¹. However,

¹ Webster (2006) has five settings that configure analytical dimensions for understanding the paradigm of social organization that is drawn around the introduction of information and communication technologies in our experience. We present here the understanding of the author as regards the cultural setting.

The lusophony in the blogosphere: from the “imagined community” to the “imaginative community”

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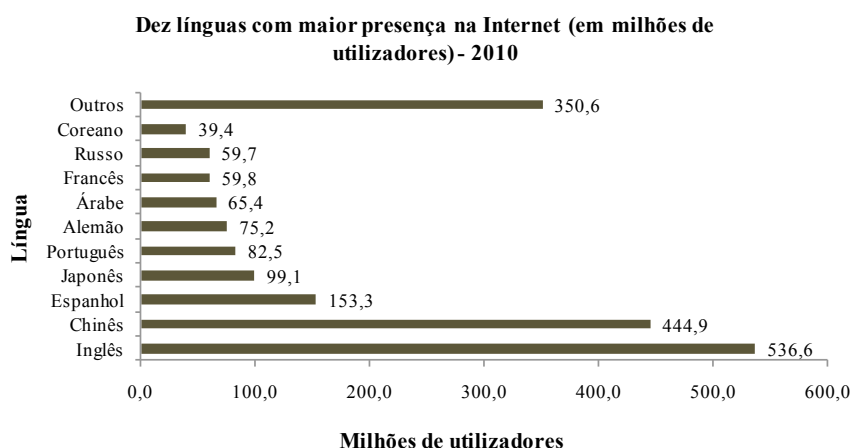
it seems pertinent to question the cultural transformations associated with this information abundance. This question makes sense because in the Castoriadis (1999) understanding, the production and reproduction of information supported by digital technologies are part of a historical moment when there is nothing really new to say². By contrast, Lévy (2003) thinks the spread of cyberspace has created favorable conditions for creative freedom in a global scale, at the present time. It dues to the multiple advantages of the internet as a communication system: low cost, real-time interaction and, mainly, expression freedom. Therefore, cyberspace is considered by Lévy as a place of empowerment, a new *agora* for political deliberation, conducting to the development of a collective intelligence able to include the diversity, and to the building of an indispensable public sphere to the intervention of a civil society with global consciousness. In this communication ecosystem emerges a huge power that escapes to the media elite authority, since, as observed Cross (2011), talented and creative people, who never had been given voice, shall take place in the mass culture, promoting its fracturing ideas and even their dreams. This happens, according to Mitra (2008), because “blogs and the space created by them can provide a sense of comfort and security that the real space can not guarantee” (p. 470). In the same line of thought, Barlow (2008) adds that blogs, as a new cultural phenomenon, represent society needs more than a technological possibility.

So, the blogosphere – i.e., the virtual sphere where all blogs are included - by portraying itself as a space for free discussion, able to generate controversy and to attract a significant part of the internet audience, is constituted as an interesting research field in the new media area. However, Lovink (2008) notices that despite the empowerment of Web 2.0 is evident, and blogs have transformed the world in many ways, the question that arises with greater relevance is not to identify but rather to interpret the transformations associated with them. Indeed, if the way people communicate determines the way they think, live and behave, as proposed by McLuhan (1964), we should put the hypothesis that we are living one of the most exciting moments in the history of communication (Anderson & Dresselhaus , 2011) and also ask ourselves if we are not facing a monumental cultural transformation (Cross , ditto). If we relate this new communicational reality with the powerful identity element that a common language can be, we will be able to think on the contribution of the blogosphere to increase the communication between people speaking the same language. And if we think in a language spoken by many millions of people, scattered all over the world, belonging to various ethnic groups and cultures, this task will be even more pertinent. According to Internet World Stats, in June 2010, 1,966,514,816 people worldwide used this communication device. Portuguese-speaking users were approximately 82,548,200, representing the fifth language community with the largest presence in cyberspace, as can be seen in the following graphic.

It is true that in a few years, thousands of blogs written in Portuguese flooded the internet, making the language of Camões, Guimarães Rosa and Pepetela one of the most influent on the World Wide Web. Thus, the new communication paradigm - the network society - seems to propose the blogosphere as a place in which networks of communication are established between people who speak, think and feel in Portuguese language. Admitting this optimistic view on the scope of communication permitted by the the blogosphere, can we perspective a space for discussion and debate where the non- institutional actors, traditionally forgotten by the media spotlight, make their voices sound? And would this space be able to encompass and preserve the diversity of cultural practices present in the places where

² Castoriadis (1999) refers to the exhaustion of creativity in the field of art and the consequent emergence of a false vanguard that does no more than support itself in plagiarism and collage.

Portuguese is spoken, ensuring tolerance and respect for differences? Since some authors (e.g. Sodr e, 1996; Wieviorka, 2002) posit that new communication devices offer opportunities for reinvention of cultures and identities, it is relevant to know how the blogosphere can transform the meaning of geo-cultural community of Lusophony, for now understood as “imagined community “ (Anderson 1994 [1983]: 6). To do so, it will be necessary to read between the lines not only the narratives about Lusophony produced on blogosphere, but also the discussions generated in this virtual space about the same issue.



Graphic 1 - Representation of ten languages with the largest presence on the Internet, millions of users (June 2010)³.

2. The “imaginative communities”

Beeson (2003) suggests that communities should develop their imaginative capacity if they want to fight against submersion in global information culture ⁴. The author notices that the electronic communities can not adequately replace the real communities, because the use of ICT should not be thought to transfer communities to the networks, but rather to preserve and strengthen themselves through the power of their imagination. To test this idea, based on the theories of imagination and action by Ricoeur, the analysis of social space by Bauman and practices of users by Certeau, the researcher developed an experimental design in which invited members of a local community to rebuild their own history and to think on their own experiences with hypermedia technology. The stories produced during this experiment showed similarities on the processing of text and image: virtuality, fluidity, adaptability, openness, duplication, networking and ability to change content. Thus, the reconstruction of the history of this community in digital network enabled the sharing of ideas and concepts and at the same time, the possibility to express the differences among its members. The observation of the researcher led him to the conclusion that this experience has encouraged the development of a moral space of interaction among participants, of a cognitive space planning and design of contents, and of an aesthetic space for invention and representations of components that allow establishing the interface. Hence Beeson (ditto) optimistically posits that, using these communication devices, “imaginative communities” (p. 125) can express and to reinvigorate its potential. The author proposes this idea because: the same story can be told in different ways; many

³ Source: Internet World Stats (www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm).

⁴ Indeed, Moreno (1970 [1934]) argued that the fate of a culture depends mainly on the creativity of the people who live it.

stories can be told at the same time; different stories can be connected; complementary and even contradictory or opposite stories can coexist in a connected way. This scenario is only possible, in his opinion, because there is no need to achieve to a final version of the story and because many different voices are heard without any editorial control. The author ends the description of this experiment, throwing a question: if the stories produced in hypermedia and transmitted over the network can promote better understanding on the life of a community can also mobilize it towards its reinvention?

The question left open by Beeson (ibid.) lead us one more time to the need for interpretation of the cultural transformations, namely those associated with communication in the blogosphere. The experience of the history and experiences reconstruction of a community in hypermedia on the network, rather than turn it into a digital community, had the effect of turning it into an “imaginative community”, able to tell, collate and integrate different stories. Consequently, the author proposes the hypothesis of this kind of communication practices can mobilize communities towards their own reinvention. This hypothesis concerns us, particularly on the understanding of the geo-cultural community of Lusophony transformations , through the production of narratives about itself in the blogosphere. In this regard, Martins, M. L. (forthcoming) emphasizes that the dissemination of information and knowledge operated by socio-technical networks, as well as its potential in terms of promoting human development, can promote a new direction for the geo-cultural community of Lusophony. Thus, in the author words (Martins, M. L., ditto: u/p),

By promoting the exchange and the debate of ideas, as well as activism in the network, in defense of social, political and cultural causes, socio-technical networks build and deepen the sense of citizenship of a community, build and deepen their critical and democratic sense. (...) Therefore, information and communication technologies allow discussing globally, in Portuguese language, Portuguese-speaking subjects. While is inquired the look with each country faces the Lusophony, is launched the challenge of opening new path, that is the difference, promise of dialogue, cooperation, peace and development.

In fact, the communication possibilities placed nowadays in the network society shatter many of the boundaries that were put, until very recently, to the Lusophone world: in the digital space networks, Portuguese-speaking internet users can meet to tell their stories, despite their geographical distances and cultural differences. With this assumption, we developed an empirical research that seeks to answer a set of questions: 1) – Which identity narratives are produced in the network for internet users who speak, think and feel in Portuguese? 2) - How the use of the networks have been transforming these narratives? 3) - The production of such narratives leads this “imagined community” to the status of “imaginative community”? 4) – What are the possibilities offered by the blogosphere to the reinvention of geo-cultural community of Lusophony?

3. The Research

This research was designed and took place between 2009 and 2012, having developed in three distinct steps. In the first step, we made the mapping of all the blogs and websites whose contents would configure identity narratives about the Lusophone community. In the second step, the networks of interaction between the mapped devices were identified. Be noted that this network identification was limited to Brazil, Mozambique and Portuguese blogospheres, for reasons connected with methodological options that will be presented below. The result of the work of these two steps intended to set up a partial Lusophone cyberspace cartography (Macedo, Martins & Macedo, 2010). . Finally, in the third step, fifteen online blogs and websites were selected in Brazil, Mozambique

and Portugal (five per country) to conduct case studies. The choice of the three countries was designed from distinct geo-cultural realities within the Portuguese-speaking community. The first one was Brazil, the South American giant with nearly 200 years of independence within a great economic growth, which gives it the status of one of the emerging powers at the global scale. The second one was Mozambique, one of the poorest countries of the world, located in Austral Africa, and independent since 1975. The third one was Portugal, the former colonial power, a small, poor and peripheral country in the European context. Despite this, Portugal presents the best indicators of development among all Portuguese-speaking countries. A range of reasons, including budgetary, prevented the extension of the selected blogs and sites sample for conducting case studies. Moreover, we have designed multi-method research process for the conducting of case studies - which comprised not only the analysis of the narratives contained in posts, as well as face to face in-depth interviews with the bloggers - prevented the extension of the sample to a larger number of cases due to limitations of time and movement in physical space. Noted that the preparation and the conducting of the case studies took place during 2011.

The criteria for selection of fifteen blogs, five for each country, were as follows: being written from Brazil, Mozambique and Portugal; concerned on one of these countries or combine, in their approach one of these countries towards the other(s) country(ies); directly or indirectly related to issues of Lusophone thoughts, particularly on identity, social memory, intercultural relations, colonialism, post-colonial period, etc.; generate interactivity and debate between the author and the followers; contain a list of links that allows the analysis of social networks and sociability; have been updated with frequency, particularly in 2010, which reports the beginning of this research, and throughout 2011, the year in which the case studies were conducted. Departing from these criteria, we selected five online blogs and sites from each of the three reference countries - Brazil, Mozambique and Portugal – which we present briefly in Table 1. It is noted that during the time dedicated to this research, one of selected blogs for case study was transformed into a site format site: Cultura Brasil/Portugal.

Blog/Site	Country of origin	Kind of device
Lusofonia Horizontal	Brazil	Blog
Trezentos	Brazil	Blog
Cultura Brasil/Portugal	Brazil	Blog / Site
Todos os fogos o fogo	Brazil	Blog
Jornal Eletrônico Brasil Portugal	Brazil	Blog
Ma-schamba	Mozambique	Blog
Rabiscando Moçambique	Mozambique	Blog
Ximbitane	Mozambique	Blog
B'andhla	Mozambique	Blog
Contrapeso 3.0	Mozambique	Blog
Etnias: o bisturí da sociedade	Portugal	Blog
Alto Hama	Portugal	Blog
Luís Graça e Camaradas da Guiné	Portugal	Blog

Outro Portugal	Portugal	Blog
Buala - Cultura Contemporânea Africana	Portugal	Site (includes the blog “Dá fala”)

Table 1 - Selected Devices for case study

3.1. Approach to the Lusophone narratives in cyberspace

The analysis of the narratives produced on the internet about the geo-cultural community of Lusophony was guided by the theoretical and methodological principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) formulated by Van Dijk (2005). Following these principles, we analyzed the narratives in question, not as autonomous discursive structures, but as a result of interactions and situated social practices anchored in socio-historical, political and cultural relations. Thus, “more specifically, the CDA focuses on the ways in which the discourse structures put in place, confirm, justify or challenge relations of power and dominance in society” (Van Dijk, *ibid.*: 20). In this sense, the analysis did not focus on formal linguistic and grammatical structures of these narratives; adopted rather an interpretive approach that would allow us to identify and analyze the main meanings that can be interpreted from these narratives. These feelings should be understood as previous in the production of the analyzed narratives. In this analysis, we also considered the effects of ownership of these narratives by the followers of the devices in the construction of conceptions around the idea of Lusophony. Being produced in the blogosphere, a place where many voices can be heard, these narratives can both express the position of dominant groups and power holders, as well as the position of groups representing counterweights.

The critical discourse analysis was developed from the identification, extraction and interpretation of a set of 45 narratives presented by selected blogs and sites for case study (three posts per blog or site), in which issues directly or indirectly related to the geo-cultural community of Lusophony were discussed. The selection of these narratives was not guided by criteria of periodization, once this would undercut the relevance of the examined narratives. So, after the diachronic reading of all posts published since the creation of the devices, we selected those which have proved to be most representative, regardless of its date of publication. At the end of the collection, it was found that the 45 selected posts were published between 2007 and 2011, most of them on the last year, coincidentally, the completion of the case studies. The analysis of the narratives was complemented by the analysis of the interviews with the bloggers. For consistency reasons, these were also analyzed according to the guidelines of the CDA. Indeed, according to this approach, the speeches can not be separated from those who produce them, if we want to understand the power relations translated by them. Thus, the overall results of this analysis will be presented crossing the posts and the interviews information.

3.2. Overall Results

The results show that identity narratives produced in the digital space by internet users who speak, think and feel in Portuguese language are actually diverse, representing different voices. Often, these narratives are really alternative to the dominant currents narratives broadcasted by traditional media. It was possible to verify, for example, that the posts extracted for analysis demonstrated contradictory discourses on the idea of Lusophony, that go towards the opposition between its acceptance and its rejection, as well as the opposition between its promotion and its deconstruction. From the posts analysis, also emerged some ideas about the different centralities of Lusophone community,

the different uses of the Portuguese language and the different meanings of cultural interactions in this community, which lead us to discourses that are not present beyond the digital sphere. Thus, this research brought to light some of the many stories that are told in the digital networks on the history and the experiences of Portuguese-speaking people. Once linked and compared, these different stories point to the need to rethink the meaning of geo-cultural community of Lusophony. Indeed, the analyzed narratives present on one hand, Lusophony as a Portuguese colonial empire heritage and, on the other hand, Lusophony as a clear proof of its radical disappearance.

The results obtained from this research also emphasizes the strengthening of the geo-cultural community of Lusophony through the use of imagination in networks. According to the interviewed bloggers, Portuguese language cyberspace addressed by this research presents high-quality, well-designed devices, promoting discussions between the authors and their followers. This perception was confirmed by research, linking the development of ethical, cognitive and esthetic construction of the Lusophone cyberspace dimensions. We underline that these dimensions were proposed by Beeson (*ibid.*) to the identification of the emergence of “ imaginative communities “ in digital networks. Consequently, it will be possible to propose the idea that the path taken by these networks for the geo-cultural community of Lusophony, a collective still conceived as “imagined community “, potentiates its progressive evolution to the status of “imaginative community”. Hence, one can profile the possibility of its reinvention in the digital space, which is given by the blogosphere.

4. Conclusions

The research results still cannot be taken as conclusive, suggesting only the interpretation of possibilities. It should be recalled that the research, besides taking object a community in which infoexclusion rates are still high, was methodologically limited to a certain time and limited space. Partial mapping of Lusophone cyberspace was validated for the period between July and September 2010. For its part, the case studies were conducted during the year 2011 . Thus, the possibilities of reinventing geo-cultural community of Lusophony must be interpreted in the narrow horizon of this year and through empirical research, because the communication dynamics between Portuguese-speaking Internet users in the digital networks were not monitored during the subsequent time. There is also the stress spatially circumscribed the scope of this research, by diverse limitations, was seen confined to the study of blogs originating in Brazil, Portugal and Mozambique. Consequently, the narrow sample representativeness of the selected devices, when opposed to the vast universe of which it was extracted, leads to the research results are valid only for the interpretation of the dynamics occurring in the cyberspace of the reference countries of cyberspace. So, the interpretation of the results cannot be framed into the risky field of extrapolation. To move from proposition of possibilities to proposition of scientifically proven facts will require empirical research presented here meet significant advances, particularly in the expansion and diversification of the studied sample, either by adding blogs and websites from other Portuguese-speaking countries, either through inclusion of a greater number cases for study. Also emphasize that the presentation of more definitive conclusions from this type of research requires also extending the time for monitoring devices.

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