

“Bonde dos Nike Fit”: Ideological and Identity Issues towards a Graffiti in the City of Juiz de Fora/Brazil

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Abstract The linguistic landscapes (BLOMMAERT & MALY, 2014; BLOMMAERT, 2016) of urban centers are characterized by diverse visual stimuli, which include store plates, billboards, banners, road signs, advertisements etc. In addition, an artistic, linguistic and cultural expression frequent in some cities is the graffiti. Therefore, we discuss a photograph of a graffiti taken on a field research, near the outskirts of Juiz de Fora city, Brazil, in which different ideological and identity aspects converge. The inscription registered in a photograph, "Bonde dos Nike Fit", in which there is a Portuguese and English code-switching seems to be a kind of effort for social meaning (re)construction, in which the individual shows contradictory identities.

Keywords Graffiti, Ostentation funk, Political, Ideological and identity aspects

1. Introduction

This paper is part of the research project Social Mobility and its Implications for the Linguistic Landscape from Juiz de Fora/ Brazil, approved on the Notice 01/2015 - Universal Demand/Fapemig, that aims to discuss issues related to superdiversity (VERTOVEC, 2006; BLOMMAERT, 2010) – which exists in varying degrees in the world –, in a Brazilian interior city, through an Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis. In this work specifically, we aim to discuss ideological and identity aspects (BAUMAN, 2005; MOITA LOPES, 2002) which are related to a graffiti photograph taken on the field research. This graffiti was made in a wall in the outskirts of an interior city called Juiz de Fora, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil.

According to Blommaert and Maly (2014:1), in the past decade, it emerged a sociolinguistics branch named Linguistic Landscape. The researches that have taken this perspective aim to investigate the presence of visible bits of written language in billboards, shop signs, graffiti, road signs etc. So, they are concerned about language used in a specific environment, considering words and images displayed in public space.

In this work, we use the Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis, considered by Blommaert and Maly (2014) and Blommaert (2016) as a second turn in the studies about linguistic landscapes (LL). This is because, according

to the authors, the “first wave” of studies that follow this perspective was marked by a synchronic, static and quantitative approach. This is quite the opposite of what we intend to do here. Although these studies show multilingualism in the present time, they “[...] fail to explain how the presence and distribution of languages could be connected with specific populations and communities and the relationships between them” (BLOMMAERT & MALY, 2014:3).

Herein, we deal with “[...] traces of multimodal communicative practices within a sociopolitically structured field which is historically configured” (BLOMMAERT, 2016:1). So, this paper aims to analyze a graffiti photograph considering not only what is written on the wall but also the symbolic relationships. We understand that linguistic landscape are not constituted by random registers but motivated by the social context of production, considering we are not studying only non-places (as it seems to be the focus of the “first wave”), but also what Malinowski (2009) defends when discuss the “authorship”. For him, the “authorship” is a partial response to a question in the LL literature: “what is the symbolic and political significance of a particular linguistic code’s appearance with other codes in bilingual signs?” (MALINOWSKI, 2009:107). Thus, who are the people that put up the signs and what motivates them to choose a specific language?

We start this paper with a thought by Bauman (2004). In his work named “Identity”, the author uses the puzzle allegory. According to him, the personal identity (or the personal identities) is composed as a figure with puzzle pieces. However, this figure is incomplete, many pieces are missed, unlike the game bought in a store, which is already

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complete and reveal a whole design to be mounted (a “targeted task for the purpose”). The identities are “directed to the means”, since you do not begin the task with a “final image”. You experience. You must find the pieces, experience what you have, and get something never definitive.

This is our aim in this work. We will use some available pieces in order to understand the possible identities and ideologies that permeate the graffiti we analyze here. We cannot say definitively and restrictively that the individual who made the graffiti is one way or another, since in “liquid times”, what is “solid can break-up” (TIMM *et al.*, 2010:871, our translation).

From these considerations, this work consists of two sections. In the first one, we present and discuss some aspects about the photograph “Bonde dos Nike Fit”. We focus on the Brazilian rhythm funk and its sheds – including the ostentation funk –, and on the North American brand Nike. In the second section, we make considerations about identity and ideological aspects related to the picture.

2. Describing and Thinking about the Photograph “Bonde dos Nike Fit”

In this work, we aim to reflect about the expression “Bonde dos Nike Fit” (Picture 1) from a graffiti made in a wall located in the suburb from Juiz de Fora. We consider, in this context, that graffiti is what Pennycook (2009) calls the “Twenty-First Century stained glass windows”, since it allows the access to what happen in streets and at the same time inside the individuals’ minds.



Picture 1. Pedro Henrique Krambeck Street, Juiz de Fora/Brazil

In this case, the term “bonde” is a Brazilian social construction that encompasses the idea of “group that likes the funk rhythm”. This term is stigmatized and often linked to frames such as “violence” and “marginality”. An example is the definition of “funk carioca” presented in the website Wikipedia¹.

[...] Funk songs discuss varied topics such as poverty, human dignity, racial pride of black people, sex (breaking moral values), violence and social injustice. Social analysts believe that carioca funk is a genuine expression of the severe social issues that burden the poor and black people in Rio.

For the website, funk expresses social issues that are linked to poor people. It is not totally veritable, considering the different funk’s sheds and lyrics that speak on variety topics. According to Moraes (2014:35), the rhythm funk is divided in:

- (i) Proibid ão (Prohibited): funk that makes apology both to crime, drugs and sexual appeal. It emerged in the early 1990s.
- (ii) Melody: it has some electronic music characteristics and a finely tuned voice. Its lyrics are focused on themes about love. It also emerged in the early 1990s.
- (iii) Conscious funk: arose from rap influences and aims to aware people about social problems and criticism of the government. It exists since the funk parties foundations in 1970s.
- (iv) Funk ostenta ção (ostentation funk): it uses designer clothing, expensive cars, luxury homes and beautiful women. It is relatively new since it emerged in 2008.

Diverse issues (such as dance, girls, relationships etc.) are used by many MCs (funk singers) in Brazil, and they are not only related to poverty and social problems. In this work, we speak on the ostentation funk. An example is the song “Isso que é vida” (“This is a good life”) by MC Guim ê that refers to the idea of having money:

So come here girl
Hang out in a Santa Fe
Or in a R1, if it's adventure you want!

“Santa Fe”, cited in the lyric, is a car produced by Hyundai Motors, and “R1” refers to a motorcycle produced by Yamaha Motor. Both cost more than R\$ 200.000,00.

2.1. What is Funk, anyway?

Funk is a popular musical rhythm that mobilizes many youths in Brazil, despite the social stigma underpinned by other sectors from society. North American rhythms which emerged in 1960s influenced it, such as soul, R&B, rock and psychedelic music. The characteristics of this musical style are syncopated rhythm, dense bass line, a section of heavy metals and rhythmic, and a remarkable and danceable percussion (beat).

According to Arruda *et al.* (2010:407), in the late 1980s, funk was not represented by media as a threatening manifestation of public order, but as a suburban leisure for young people. However, in 1992, the first event called “arrastão” happened in Brazil. It consists in collective theft by a group of people from the suburb. They robbed everything, even clothes of passers-by. It happened in Copacabana beach, attended by upper social classes.

¹Available in: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Funk_carioca>. Access on: March 15, 2016.

According to Facina (2009:3), this fact promoted a criminalizing construction of people who like funk by the media, which presented the “arrastões” as assaults carried out by “funkers” slum gangs. In 1995, the funk parties were linked to drugs traffic. Because of these facts and others alike, funk is a cultural manifestation associated with violence and criminalization by part of society.

Many cases on funk criminalization may be found in media. An example on this funk’s stereotype is a reporter in the website R7². The title is “Young couple is beaten to death in a funk party in the Pope’s Square in Belo Horizonte [Minas Gerais]”. According to the website, the victims were beaten while leading a clandestine funk party known as “Monday no Law”. In other website³, there is the reporter “Violence: young boy runs the shots in a funk party in Betim [Minas Gerais]”, that speaks on a man who died inside a show house. On Google, it is possible to find many cases just like these ones. Because of that, the rhythm funk and people who like it are sometimes generalized and stigmatized.

2.2. Ostentation Funk

The ostentation funk is characterized by the exaltation of richness and enjoyment. An example is the lyric by MC Danado (a funk singer from São Paulo), according to Pino (2012)⁴:

[...] “Life is to have a Hyundai and a Hornet/ 10,000 to spend, Rolex and Juliet”, sings MC Danado in a funk song called “Top do momento”. For those who did not understand, he talks about a car, a motorcycle, money, a watch and a pair of glasses respectively – a chorus estimated in R\$ 400 mil [around US\$ 112.000,00]. In the show that happens in East, a region that concentrates popular neighborhoods in Sao Paulo, the verses are repeated blaring for nearly 1.000 people present.

The music video “Top do momento”, by MC Danado, follows the order we describe here. The singer gets inside a mansion in an expensive motorcycle, and there is a kind of party, where there are many beautiful women in small bikinis around a pool. The singer changes his clothes many times, and presents different accessories while sings. Later, he is driving an expensive car with beautiful women, and they show wads of cash.

It is also important to highlight the “kit”, an expression that defines the garment accessories: shoes, shirts, rings and necklaces, sunglasses and cap. According to Pino (2012), the brands Oakley, Nike and Adidas are among the most cited in the lyrics.

2.3. Talking about the Brand Nike

“Nike” is a well-known North American brand, in Brazil acquired especially by the elite. In the Internet, it is possible to find phrases such as:

[...] Quem os compra [tênis da Nike], leva de brinde todo um ideal de vitória. Mesmo que não ganhe uma medalha sequer em qualquer competição esportiva⁵.

[...] Who buys them [the Nike shoes], takes as gift a whole ideal of victory even if he/she do not win a medal in any sports competition.

In a website about the 10 most expensive shoes in world⁶, a Nike shoes named “Nike SB Flom Dunk High” is in the first place with the price US\$ 7.500 (the equivalent of R\$ 27.900,00 in Brazil, same price of a new car). In the official Nike website, there are shoes for men that cost US\$ 325,00 (the equivalent of R\$ 1.200,00, almost the salary paid for a month of work to 7 in 10 Brazilians⁷).

The word “fit”, also presented in the picture “Bonde dos Nike Fit”, means literally “suitable”, “appropriate”. There is also a part of the brand which is called “Nike Dri-Fit”, focused on sports. Both ideas create a paradox between what is “outcast” (funk rhythm) by media and high society, and what is for elite (“Nike” or “Nike Dri-Fit”). This resources mixture does not allow a priori significance, since it indicates a producer and an unknown production situation by those who are not part of the group.

As Pino (2012) affirms, Nike appears in many ostentation funk songs. An example is the song “Barbie éo Caralho” (we present our version in English), by MC Bin Laden:

You take care that she makes the game
 Fuck, she is not Barbie
 She just has the princess face
 She is boring full of gold
 Favorite colors? Black and white
 [...] If she is talking about car, it is Maserati
 And if she talks about motorcycle, it is Kawasaki
 If it is four sprung, it is Nike shoes
 And if she talks about whiskey, it is only Johnnie Walker
 [...].

In this case, MC Bin Laden exalts brands such as Maserati (a luxury car), Kawasaki (a motorcycles brand), Nike (shoes) and Johnnie Walker (a whiskey brand). All these brands are linked to prestige and economic power.

²Available in: <<http://www.r7.com/>>. Access on: April 02, 2016.

³Available in: <http://tribunadebetim.com.br/artigos/395-viol%C3%A2ncia-jovem-%C3%A9-executado-a-tiros-em-baile-funk-em-betim.html?reload=220>. Access on: April 02, 2016.

⁴Available in: <<http://revistaepoca.globo.com/cultura/noticia/2012/09/o-funk-da-ostentacao-e-m-sao-paulo.html>>. Access on: April 4, 2016.

⁵Available in:

<<http://www.administradores.com.br/artigos/marketing/nikea-historia-da-marca-mais-famosa-do-mundo/21619/>>. Access on: March 15, 2016.

⁶Available in: <<http://top10mais.org/top-10-tenis-mais-caros-mundo>>. Access on: March 15, 2016.

⁷IBGE Data. Available in:

<<http://economia.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2012/12/19/ibge-72-dos-brasileiros-ganhavam-ate-2-salarios-minimos-em-2010.htm>>. Access on: March 15, 2016.

3. Some Considerations about Identity and Ideological Aspects

A number of authors have dedicated their studies to individuals' identity aspects in the postmodern era. The issue seems to be a wide researching field about the modern individual who is surrounded and is inserted in a society constantly transformed by the information. “Identity”, therefore, seems to be a fertile field to update and reinterpret works that aim to relate individual, language and society. According Rajagopalan (2003, p. 25, our translation),

[...] our basic concepts related to language were largely inherited from the nineteenth century, when it ruled the motto “one nation, one language, one culture”. Predictably they are proving increasingly unable to match the reality experienced in new millennium, reality marked sharply by new phenomena and irreversible trends such as globalization and the interaction between cultures, with direct consequences on the life and on the people everyday behavior, including habits and language customs⁸.

These “liquid times” are marked by identities fragmentation, which are also “liquid” since they are inconclusive and fragile, in an “eternally provisional” condition (BAUMAN, 2005:22). Bauman uses the term “liquid” to refer to highly adaptable aspects from a world that is always in transformation, so nothing is stable. In this perspective, the world and the identity of the individual behave as liquids, i.e., constantly in change. As Bauman affirms (2005:35), identities are free course, and now it is up to each individual, man or woman, catch them in flight, using its own resources and tools.

In this context, the individual who recognized the idea of “nation” and “stability” and differed from the other by a geographical territory realizes himself in the midst of this “liquid” society. So, he tries to identify with groups and different cultural aspects that go beyond the tight and traditional concepts of “language” and “culture”.

Then, in this context of social changes, the individual seeks for something to identify with, since the feeling of belonging to groups seems to be characteristic of human beings. This creates an illusion, a sense of unity, which removes the isolation sense in a world that has to be shaped mainly by virtual relationships. Bauman (2005: 35) affirms that “the aspiration for identity comes from the desire for security”.

According to Moita Lopes (2002:34), three dashes have been identified as today social identities characteristics:

⁸[...] os nossos conceitos básicos relativos à linguagem foram em grande parte herdados do século XIX, quando imperava o lema “uma nação, uma língua, uma cultura”. Previsivelmente eles estão se mostrando cada vez mais incapazes de corresponder à realidade vivida neste novo milênio, realidade marcada de forma acentuada por novos fenômenos e tendências irreversíveis como a globalização e a interação entre as culturas, com consequências diretas sobre a vida e o comportamento cotidiano dos povos, inclusive no que diz respeito a hábitos e costumes linguísticos (RAJAGOPALAN, 2003:25, as in original).

fragmentation, contradiction and process. It is true that identities are always under construction, since they depend on the discursive realization in particular circumstances, i.e., on the meanings that participants give themselves and others engaged in speech. In this sense, we may not think about identity as something already built, ready, finished, once it is always moving together with the world. We are always (re)building it according to the experiences and speeches in which we engage.

Moreover, Moita Lopes (2002) agrees to Bauman (2005) when he states that identities are fragmented. It means that a person does not have a hegemonic identity – since someone cannot be explained only by his/her race, for example. In the case of this study, the identity cannot be explained by the taste for funk rhythm, because people are complex as well as social identities that coexist in the same person. As Bruner (1997:60 apud MOITA LOPES, 2002:62) says, “[...] we are a colony of possible self-same.”

3.1. Aspects of Identity and Ideology in “Bonde dos Nike Fit”

About the graffiti presented on Picture 1, it is possible to recognize some identity aspects defended by Moita Lopes (2002) and Bauman (2005). Rather, it is necessary to consider graffiti as manifestations of people who participate in interactions all the time, have their own experiences, stories, motivations and goals as well as their own social networks.

Therefore, by combining the word “bonde” (related to the funk movement in Brazil) to the brand “Nike”, the individuals are conveying a message that using a social prestige brand is also being part of a prestigious circle.

In this context, it is understandable that a socially marginalized and “discredited” group demonstrates the need to affirm and reframe its role in society. The quest of this group for a “we” may be considered an attempt to demarcate a “place” towards the social values attached to a consumption and prestige pattern.

In this sense, affirming and denying an identity seems to be an existential issue, an individual positioning as a social being and their role as a world citizen in these liquid times. This positioning is related to a statement consumer perspective linked to foreign influences as a “place” of social prestige. As Rajagopalan (2003:59) says: “[...] in the humanity history, the linguistic identity of people never was so subjected to foreign influences as nowadays. Volatility and instability have become identity trademarks in the postmodern world”⁹.

Ergo, combining the use of a foreign brand to a musical style socially passed over demonstrates in this context a preciousness attributed to the brand and the English language in general. This is part of the prestige that English seems to

⁹[...] nunca na história da humanidade a identidade linguística das pessoas esteve tão sujeita como nos dias de hoje às influências estrangeiras. Volatilidade e instabilidade tornaram-se as marcas registradas das identidades no mundo pós-moderno.

have in Brazil and that gives the speakers considered "discredited" access to the desired status for the group, since, according to Rajagopalan (2003:65), "the foreign language has always represented prestige. Who master a foreign language is admired as a cultured and distinguished person". Thus, the use and/or knowledge on aspects of the language/English culture is the expression of the group identity who uses it, because "the languages are the very expression of the identities of who appropriates them" (RAJAGOPALAN, 2003:69).

Thus, since the construction of an individual identity happens through a manifestation of belonging to a group and through denying of belonging to another group, the funklers seems to use the graffiti "Bonde dos Nike fit" to affirm the idea "now I am also part of the society prestige group because I use Nike", without denying his/her origin, probably marked by the word "bonde".

We note then that individuals belonging to the group "Bonde dos Nike Fit", besides demarcating their identity with graffiti, also are related to political and ideological issues. This is because as Rajagopalan (2003) argues "all discourse is political, in that it produces different effects on reality, guys, relationships, behaviors, languages, among others."

This is evidenced through the "ostentation funk" songs, in which the images about exaggeration on consumption intend to combine funk musical style to money and wealth. According to Pinheiro and Rodrigues (2013:518, our translation) about the "ostentation funk",

[...] the vision as a result of a contemporary capitalism consumerist society is aggregated to the singer figure that defines his/her own identity as represents [...]. Their vision of themselves, in turn, is guided by the property acquired and their economic power¹⁰.

So, there is a relationship between the social status of funk ostentation followers with their economic power, as if money could "buy" a kind of prestige. In this context, the oppressed shows the oppressors that can have what the prestigious stratum of society possess. Thus,

[...] In the figure of monetary and financial value elements that they boast it is implied the desire to match the dominant classes, and more than that to become superior in that the songs tend to expose the acquisition of luxury added to the "humility", which is the characteristic bond that would keep the individual still belonging to their original community (PINHEIRO & RODRIGUES, 2013:516, our translation)¹¹.

¹⁰[...] a visão resultante da sociedade consumista do capitalismo contemporâneo é agregada à figura do cantor que define sua identidade pela forma que se representa [...]. Sua visão sobre si mesmo, por sua vez, se pauta nos bens adquiridos com seu poderio econômico (PINHEIRO & RODRIGUES, 2013:516, as in original).

¹¹Ou seja, na figura dos elementos de valor monetário e financeiro que ostentam está implícita a vontade de se igualar às classes dominantes, e mais do que isso tornar-se superior na medida em que as canções tendem a expor a aquisição do luxo somada à "humildade", que seria o elo característico que manteria o

As noted, the graffiti "Bonde dos Nike Fit" seems to demonstrate a desire to reach a new status in the postmodern social reality. The presented ideology, in this context, is connected to a transformation in power relations, since the start point of funk is a refusal to the subordinate position.

Final Considerations

In this work, we considered the graffiti "Bonde dos Nike Fit" as a discursive practice, as a way of action in world. This is because, as Foucault (1979) affirms, our discursive practices are not opaque but guided by beliefs, world views, ideologies, and power positions. So, language in this sense is linked to participation in processes of social change (funk gets a new status and also its followers), construction of subjectivity (the groups as part of the individual identity), political action in world (considering that power relations support different ideologies, also built through discourse and social practices, which are maintained by different groups for different purposes) and comprehension of the other.

In "Bonde dos Nike Fit", it is possible to identify a kind of contradiction. We can see the word "bonde", linked to the funk rhythm stigmatized by society, and the brand "Nike", linked to economic power and status. In this context, we recognize the new shed of funk named "ostentation funk", from which the "funklers" declare themselves as part of this privileged world and try to construct a new identity. The idea of poverty is abolished by this new generation of funk that likes luxury and money and aims to display expensive items. This idea is directly related to a change in power relations, considering that the suburb and its music are entering the elite world, through brands which used to be a privilege for the rich people only.

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