

THE NOTION OF TRANSGLOSSIA AND THE PHENOMENON OF LINGUISTIC MESTIZATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

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ABSTRACT: *In this study, we discuss the urgency for notions that can translate more acceptably the daily phenomenon of the *mélange* of languages and/or dialects intensified in the contemporary life by the astonishing increase of face to face interactions or media interactions among people and their cultures as a result of the expansion of means of transport faster and faster and of new technologies of media communication. In analogy to the notion of transculturality used in the sense of translation, transference, or transportation between cultural boundaries in opposition to the idea of culture as the hard nucleus, we propose the notion of transglossia. Away from the assumption that states the primacy of complete linguistic systems, the notion of transglossia allows for bringing closer languages in the state of flux. In the prefix *trans-*, beyond the meanings of motion and transit, reverberates the overlapping between languages.*

KEY WORDS: *transglossia; linguistic mestizations; cultural translation.*

Approaching the city of Cuiabá at the beginning of this century is to approach a linguistic melody woven with many timbres. The history of its formation along the 18th, 19th, and

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20th centuries and its recent history in the last four decades is interwoven and results in a tainted singular configuration which, however, is not immune to the processes of cultural globalization.

The socio-linguistic-cultural history of Cuiabá begins to be told initially from the interaction between the local indigenous societies and the 'bandeirantes paulistas'¹ who arrived at the start of the 18th century bringing in their luggage the "caipira" (rural) culture and dialect. Secluded by its distance and being very rural until the first half of the 20th century, the state of Mato Grosso showed a singular culture very different from the culture of southern Brazil that was getting urban and modern since the end of the 19th century. Windows and doors wide open day and night, chairs on the sidewalks, many "anecdotes", relaxing and siesta during the mid-day sun composed the scenario of life in the city. Not long ago, a predominantly oral culture, a quiescent rhythm and tranquility unthinkable in other Brazilian cities marked the "cuiabana"² society.

However, since the first years of the sixties of the 20th century under the shield of government programs which, oriented to protect the Brazilian Amazon, pushed the country to the interior, financially encouraging settlements in the mid-west and north regions of the country, the state of Mato Grosso has lived under a colossal influx of immigration coming mainly from the south and southeast. Today, the population of the state is formed principally by migrants, the so-called "paus-rodados"³. This fact shakes everything that was once

¹ The expression "bandeirantes paulistas" refers to a group of individuals, generally adventurers, from the state of São Paulo, who organized expeditions to the unexplored state of Mato Grosso in search of Indians and gold in the 18th century.

² People who are born and raised in Cuiabá and speak with a peculiar accent are called "cuiabanos".

³ "Paus-rodados" is a popular name (sometimes depreciative) given to strangers/foreigners who try to settle down in another region.

settled in the region changing deeply its cultural and sociolinguistic configuration.

Heretofore an “apparently” homogeneous linguistic scenario, Cuiabá, as a gateway to the Amazon, is presented today as a scenario highly polyphonic. In it we hear no more the tones of the “cuiabano” speech, but also the speech of the “gaúcho”, the “paranaense”, the “catarinense”, the “goiano”, the “mineiro”, the “paulista”, the “nordestino”⁴ and so on. Besides being a stage for encounters and exchanges among dialectal varieties of the Brazilian Portuguese, Cuiabá, similarly to other contemporary complex societies, is also cross-cutted by cultural fluxes that through satellite do not stop spreading out and put into circulation English, the language of globalization. After all, as Canclini (1995) insists, the cultural globalization is not anything else than the Americanization of culture, under the shield of the triumph of capitalism and neo-liberalism in its North-American version. If the 16th century was the Iberian century, the 20th and 21st centuries have been American.

In order to experience the sensation of strolling around the cultural-linguistic scenario of the contemporary Cuiabá, we transcribe here an exemplary episode⁵.

1. AN EXEMPLARY EPISODE

A student of “Letras” (a Language course) in the Federal University of Mato Grosso, who was taking Linguistics IV, which syllabus foresees the study of articulation between language and society, by one of these happy chances, finds a sheet of paper carefully folded in four parts in a public restroom. Moved by the spontaneous

⁴ All these listed names refer to people who come from different regions of Brazil speaking with different accents.

⁵ This episode was extracted from the article “Crique aqui: um signo mestiço” [“Cric here: A mestizo sign] written by Cox (2001).

curiosity of every woman, she unfolded the paper and came upon the following text:

*Window Explorer*⁶

Para passar os arquivos do disquete no computador ⇒ clicar
Disquete (irá aparecer os arquivos)

Para passá-los para o Meu Documento clicar nos arquivos e
jogar na pasta de Meus Documentos (todas as pastas)

Para colocar os arquivos na lixeira clicar nos arquivos e apertar
em delete aparecerá uma tela (sim)

Para restaurar os arquivos, selecionar os arquivos e ir no
arquivo (restaurar)

Disquete

Arquivo

Novo(pasta) escrever um novo nome (curso) enter

⁶ The words that were in English in the original text are shown in italics in the translation piece here. We also have kept the word “clic” (click) being it a phenomenon of interpenetration of English, Standard Brazilian Portuguese, and “Cuiabanês” – the mestizo sign.

Window Explorer

To pass the files of the disc into the computer P **clic** disc (it will show up the following files)

To pass them to My Documents **clic** the files and throw in the folder of My Documents (all the folders)

To place the files in the trash bag **clic** the files and press *Delete* and it will show up a screen (yes)

To restore the files select the files and go to files (restore)

Disc

File

New (folder) write a new name (course) *enter*

Clic course (course beside All folders. Under disc. *enter* and after that give 2 **clics**)

Clic courses (files – new – folder) write the name – *enter* ⇒ 2 **clics** (courses)

To form a folder in the *Word clic Word* – file – new – folder write the name ⇒ 2 **cli** (full transcription of an anonymous text found in a public bathroom in 2001).

Cricar em (curso do lado Todas as pastas. embaixo de Disquete. enter e depois dar 2 criques)

Cricar em cursos (arquivo – novo – pasta) escreve o nome – enter ⇒ 2 criques (cursos)

Para formar uma pasta no Word cricar em Word – arquivo – novo – pasta escrever o nome enter ⇒ 2 cri” (transcrição na íntegra do texto anônimo encontrado em banheiro público em 2001)

Maybe an anonymous computer learner had left his/her first lesson notes in a public restroom. The student who had recently studied the linguistic phenomenon of “rotacismo” (the change of [l] for [r] like in **cric** instead of **click**) in the perspective of sociolinguistics was enough shrewd to notice the traces of the phenomenon in the manuscript left probably, if one judges his/her textual performance, by a well educated “cuiabano”. The student supposing that her linguistics professor would appreciate to have such a text in her hands decided to share it with her class at first opportunity.

This episode appeared to us especially appropriate to be read as a phenomenon of syncretism, hybridity or linguistic mestization between English – the global language – and Brazilian Portuguese – the national language – and the *cuiabanês*⁷ – the local language. It made us reflect on the alleged belief that the integrity and supremacy of Brazilian Portuguese would be threatened by the invasion of English. Such a belief, in the beginning of the decade of 2000, mobilized the community of Brazilian linguists to an uptight debate against the Law Project no. 1676/1999 presented to the National Congress by the communist deputy Aldo Rebelo ruling *about the protection and defense of the Brazilian Portuguese language* with the

⁷ We chose here the term “cuiabanês” instead of “cuiabano” speech to keep the symmetry with the terms “inglês” and “português” being the suffix “+ês” a gentile designation.

purpose to restrain the use of words or expressions in foreign languages, interpreted as detrimental to the national language.

This belief anchors the view that the change resultant from the interaction between two or more languages is unilateral and acculturating. Also, it anchors the view that homogeneity, purity and linguistic eugenics are better than mestization and miscegenation. Acculturation is thought as a successful expansion of the hegemonic language that now irradiates electronically, and not militarily anymore, in a world of communication without borderlands, from the center to the peripheries provoking a linguistic genocide that threatens and devours the soul – the identity – of those who forget their mother tongue.

Such an understanding of the phenomenon of the expansion of hegemonic languages does not appear appropriate to us to explain what really occurs in a discursive event as the one reported here. When every Brazilian enunciator says *cricar*, he/she is performing an “aportuguesation” (like in Anglicization) of the foreign word that affects what is the most characteristic and productive in the Brazilian Portuguese grammar:

1. He/She frames the English verb form *to click* into the Brazilian first conjugation (*cricar*), the only verb conjugation currently productive in Brazilian Portuguese.
2. He/She forms with the lexeme *click* a noun (*crique*) that can be flexed according to the Brazilian Portuguese gender morphological structure (*crique/criques*).
3. He/She performs the process of noun agreement according to the norms of the Standard Written Brazilian Portuguese (the plural sign is repeated in all the words of the nominal syntagma – 2 *criques*) and not in accord with the vernacular Brazilian Portuguese (the plural sign is restricted to the first noun of the nominal syntagma – 2 *crique*), evidencing the capacity of alternating varieties of speech in function of the

context, that is, evidencing a fine mastery of communicative competence.

4. He/She restructures the syllable according to the canonical form of Brazilian Portuguese. In Brazilian Portuguese, one does not hold a syllable with occlusive consonants. Thus, the monosyllable *click* is transformed in the disyllable *crique* with the introduction of a neutral vowel /e/ after the consonant /k/.

5. He/She rewrites the word according to the orthographic conventions of Brazilian Portuguese using the grapheme <c> before <a> (*cricar*) and the grapheme <qu> before <e> (*criques*).

6. He/She changes the /l/ of the consonantal cluster for /r/ aggregating his/her identity as a Brazilian Portuguese speaker to the one of a genuine 'cuiabano'.

This episode shows that the vernacular erodes the borrowings subjugating them to their laws; laws of use, not paper laws. *Cricar* and its derivatives – *crique*, *criques* – are mestizo signs as a result of multiple cross-cuttings. In them coexist the past and present, the modern and archaic, the foreign and native, the global, the national and local, the rural and urban, the rural and cosmopolitan, the other and same. There is an interpenetration of temporalities, a connection of humanities, separated a long ago, that disturbs the image of history as a line. In *cricar* the meaning of syncretism is vivid. As Canevacci (1996: 21-25) states, “syncretism is global. It is territories marked by crossings between opposite currents and often mixed with diverse temperatures, salinities, colors, and flavors”⁸. The word *glocal* resulting from a *mélange* between global and local was coined to capture the complexity of current processes of cultural mutation as something that cannot be reduced to globalizing

⁸ This citation has been translated into English from the Brazilian Portuguese edition of Cannevacci (1996) by the authors.

homologation. “The syncretism is the outcome of an inter-cultural and inter-linguistic contact, and being so it is ubiquitous, pidgin, and creole: it is a contagion, a virus. The process of globalization is not simply one in that indigenous cultures are modernized, but it also is one in that modernity is indigenized”⁹ (Vasantkumar, 1992, cited in Canevacci, 1996). With respect to the case explored here, if it is true that the traditional “cuiabano” language modernizes cross-cut by fluxes of economic globalization that, under the baton of American imperialism, speaks English; it is also true that English indigenizes.

Not without reason, native speakers of English wonder at the uses of their mother tongue in printed T-shirts, names of commercial buildings, song lyrics sang by native speakers of Brazilian Portuguese that hardly or never have studied English. It is with astonishment that they observe their alleged mother tongue and do not recognize it as theirs. A good example of how the English language has been crossed by the Brazilian Portuguese language in its uses is the possessive or genitive case of nouns. In the English language grammar, the genitive signals a relation of possession by means of the forms < 's > or < ' >, respectively, either by inflecting regular singular nouns and irregular plural nouns not ending in s with 's as in “John’s house” or by adding an apostrophe after the s ending of regular plural nouns and singular forms that already end in the sound s as in “students’ book” or “Dennis’ farm”. In the genitive case, the name of the possessor appears before the thing possessed.

We can say that the genitive as a sign associated to the English language carries out a great fascination among many speakers of Brazilian Portuguese. In the domain of commercial activities, there is a real fever of the uses of the apostrophe s in the naming of the most diverse establishments. Nonetheless, hardly the form < 's >

⁹ This citation has been translated into English from the Brazilian Portuguese edition of Canevacci (1996) by the authors.

expresses possession. Sometimes, it is interpreted as the preposition of even if it does not express possession like in “Picanha’s house” (a beef restaurant). Other times, it expresses possession but it is used in nominal syntagmas crossed by the Brazilian Portuguese grammar like in “Studio model’s” (and not Model’s studio”), or “Paulo motor’s” (and not Paulo’s motor). However, in most of its uses, the form < ’s > is only a graphic sign deprived from its morphosyntatic function signaling possession, it is a significant without meaning like in the expressions “Terraçu’s”, “Tulipa’s Buffet”, “Cabelereiro Marco’s”, “Statu’s Cabelereiros”, “Salão Aquariu’s”, “Salão de Beleza Blond’s”, etc. The apostrophe s is actually a commercial brand to sell the image of the establishment as a modern store. Though emptied of its grammatical meaning, the form adds to the product that it names the status of the English language, more and better, the power of the American economy that spreading out in planetary scale simultaneously expands the dominance of English. That is, as a significant of the English language, the form < ’s > produces *per se* an effect of meaning as a desirable object.

2. TRANSCULTURALITY: A NOTION TO THINK ABOUT CULTURAL CROSS-CUTS

Nothing is less appropriate to deal with cultural and linguistic interactions unleashed in the scenarios of migrations and globalization than to start from a conservative and purist viewpoint. Nothing is less appropriate than to interpret the relation between culture and language of the center with the cultures and languages of the peripheries as a death sentence for the languages of the peripheries. One cannot underestimate the mutant potential of local languages. In the flux of the vernacular, an anthropophagic flux, the foreign words are chewed over, swallowed, absorbed, and thrown out not as pure words but as *mestizas*.

We see as necessary a displacement from our usual viewpoints regarding what we understand as culture and language. Despite the fact that we have been thinking and talking for more than thirty years about cultural *diversity* and linguistic *diversity*, diversity is always seen as a movement that derives from the unity, that is, from the norm and not on the contrary. We dare to think about such issues departing from the notion of “transculturality” which by analogy encourage us to propose the notion of “transglossia”.

The notion of transculturality appears in a constellation of terms whose specificities and borders are intertwined. Revolving around the notion of culture, there is a profusion of terms such as: difference or cultural alterity, multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, intercultural communication. The notion of culture as well as the notion of language in the field of linguistics is today a matter of great controversy among social scientists.

Authors like Clifford (1999), Gruzinski (2001), Hall (2002), Canevacci (1996), Serres (1993), among others, reflect on the concept of culture situated in the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st, scenario of globalization with its capitalist ideology authorized by the communication in real time which compresses and surpasses space distances and the separations and incommunicability among peoples. These authors have dislocated us from the orthodox view of culture as a closed system confined to a social group in the borders of a territory. The alleged native, genuine, authentic, pure, non-mixed cannot be devised any longer in the anthropological horizon. The image of stable societies in their tradition is a product of monographs and academic theories (Gruzinski (2001: 30-1). Though recognizing the contributions of the structuralist anthropology, Gruzinski observes that it, by making the Amazon the reservoir of the “wild thought”, averts the Amazons which are more mixed, contaminated and only now began to be exposed. Also Clifford (1999: 38) emphasizes that the natives never existed: “The natives, the people confined to the places where they belong to and are by them confined,

the untouched groups by the contact with a world wider, probably never existed"¹⁰.

Today as ever the idea of conceiving culture as a closed, homogeneous and stable wholeness renders problematic. One gets suspicious of the notion of culture that accentuates the essence of the Other. Such a concept was a lucky enterprise while social scientists left their familiar places to raise their tents in the heart of distant, exotic, and traditional communities which desired to preserve themselves from the Western fluxes. But on their returning home, they face social realities which are complex, vague, unstable, and conflicting and see before them a type of disorder that disturbs the sets impeccably structured and seen as authentic (Gruzinski, 2001: 52). The classic concept of culture paved on the idea of a hard nucleus, defined and unalterable, instigated to think about the contact between cultures as a encounter of other cultures confined in their proper systems. As Gruzinski says:

Insisting in the specificities and differences, in detriment of what links every culture to other sets, close or distant, soon one arrives at the rhetorics of alterity and then of multiculturalism, which defend the "cohabitation and coexistence of separated and juxtaposed groups, definitely heading for the past which is convenient to protect against the encounter with the others". Well, it is enough to examine the history of any human group to notice that this array of practices and beliefs, admitting that it has some kind of autonomy, is closer to appear with a nebula in constant movement than with a well-cut system¹¹ (Gruzinski, 2001: 51-2).

On one side, such a concept of culture sustains the relativist concept in defense of the alterity and multiculturalism and has its

¹⁰ This citation has been translated into English from the Spanish edition of Clifford (1996) by the authors.

¹¹ This citation has been translated into English from the Brazilian Portuguese edition of Gruzinski (2001) by the authors.

merit of calling into question ethnocentric practices and, not rarely, ethnocidarian (Clastres, 1978). However, on the other side, it foments the belief in stable or invariant cultural systems neglecting and evaluating as undesirable the contaminations, interpenetrations, mestizations, frontiers, and intercrossings. To account for these mixed and transitory realities and cultural processes engendered in the practices and border crossing interactions, Clifford (1999: 38) proposes the metaphor of travel.

The metaphor of travel, whose semantic field also includes other signs such as frontiers, immigration, migration, pilgrimage, exile, diaspora, and tourism, translates adequately the contemporary cultural processes. The places once thought as the continent, the soil, where culture takes root, now tend to be interpreted as locations of transit, of circulation of cultural fluxes, of face to face or media interactions. By translating culture via the term travel, the author does not only refer to its literal meaning which involves the physical displacement of people, but also to different modalities of in-out connection, including forces that cut across spaces like communication and navigation via satellite, goods that have the power to provoke cultural displacements without somebody leaving their place.

With what concepts can one translate the reality of the mixed worlds, of mestiza cultures, of “Tupis fingering lutes” which already in the beginning of the 20th century moved Mário de Andrade’s poetic sensibility? Concepts like cultural pluralism, cultural diversity, multiculturalism or interculturality do not appear to us as acceptable to translate those realities. They nominate the existence of diverse cultural groups but silence about their contaminations and constant exchange of fluids. To translate such realities, yet approximately, we opt for the term *transculturality*. The prefix *trans-*, among its so many meanings, transports the meanings of “movement across”, “movement back and forth”, “permanent movement”, “transit”, “en route”, “circulation”, “exchange”. The term *transculturality* reports us to *transculturation* coined by Fernando Ortiz in the decade of

1940 to describe the process of transition from a culture to another. According to Ortiz (1983), this process does not only consist of acquiring a different culture in the sense covered by the term acculturation. Transculturation involves two movements: one of partial rootlessness from a previous culture and another of creation of new cultural phenomena. The author explains the marriage of cultures drawing on an analogy of having a child: the child has something from their parents but there is always something different of each of the two. The concept of transculturation seems to him as indispensable to know the history of Cuba:

There were not human factors more transcendental to the “Cubanity” than those continuous, radical, and contrasting transmigrations, geographic, economic, and social, of their settlers than the perennial transience of purposes, than the life always rootless from the inhabited earth, always in disharmony with the supporting society. Men, economies, cultures and desires, all these were felt here as foreigner, transitory, mutable, “flying birds” over the country, in its coast, against itself and against its will¹² (Ortiz, 1983).

If the concept of transculturation, as proposed by Ortiz implies the loss of a previous culture, the concept of transculturality does not. Transculturality is here understood as translation in the sense put forward by Hall (2002). To him, there is no loss or assimilation but negotiation and cultural change. People do not erase their ties when they move on but they never lived or will live in a culturally unified continent. As Hall writes, people are irrevocably *translated*. With Salman Rushdie (1989), Hall (2002: 89) recalls the epistemological meaning of the term translate as “transfer”, “transport” between boundaries. That means, the original does not

¹² This piece has been translated into English from the Brazilian Portuguese version by Livia Reis of Ortiz's (1983) text by the authors.

exist, the more one goes deep in history, it is always the *mélange* that is found. Ultimately, what we are trying to say is that the alleged solid nucleus of culture is always transcultural. If we go deep in the history of an imagined homogeneous culture and revolve its archeological layers, we would see how it is *mestiza* in its fundamentals.

Moser (2005: 1), allusive to the notion of “liquid modernity” of Bauman (2001), restates the thesis that the exacerbation of mobility is a most remarkable characteristic in contemporary culture, appropriately referred by him as “culture in transit”. The notion of “culture in transit” restores a conjunction of phenomena that marks our daily life like the frequency and extension of displacements and rootlessness, the velocity and acceleration that we live in, the always growing potency and efficacy of media technologies, the ephemeral and instantaneous temporalities resulting from them. According to the author, the intense cultural mobility derives from a complex conjuncture of factors in which intervene migration fluxes, political restructurings, new technologies, fluxes of capital and commercial logic.

Studying “culture in transit”, says Moser (2005: 6), places us in a double epistemological challenge. First, how can one capture a phenomenon that is movement with tamed eyes, for centuries, to see only the stability? Second, how can one make out of a phenomenon, that involves us entirely, an object of knowledge, renouncing to the epistemic safety, guaranteed by the temporal or spatial distance between the subject and object that traditionally has presided the historical and anthropological research? As Moser says (2005: 6), “before the contemporary, guaranties and epistemological certainties do not exist anymore”¹³. Thus, in order to make the phenomenon of cultural transferences cognitively understandable and analyzable, Moser proposes a classification of

¹³ In the original: « Face au contemporain, donc, les garanties et les certitudes épistémiques ne tiennent plus » (Moser, 2005: 6).

types of movements in three domains designated as “locomotion”, “mediamotion”, and “artmotion”. We examine the first two that are closer to our interest.

The domain of “locomotion” shelters the phenomena of transit between cultures resulting from the great mobility of people in the contemporary world. Cultures have constantly been influenced by physical displacements of men but never as intensively as today owing to the development of means of transport faster and faster and more accessible to a great part of population of the planet. Under the term of “locomotion” diverse forms of volunteering or imposed displacements of people are sheltered like migrating fluxes, exile, diaspora, tourism, urban nomadism, etc. that promote the interaction and transferences between cultures of peoples.

The domain of “mediamotion” shelters the phenomena of transit between cultures caused by the audio-visual and printed media and hypermedia mainly the internet which more than another means of communication makes us experiment the paradox of contact and distance. Without dislocating us as receptors, the contemporary media especially cinema and television present to us a simulacrum of the world taking the interaction between cultures to its quintessence. Space – physical distance that separates the bodies – is not anymore an obstacle for the contact of split humanities. After all, the media allow for its instantaneous transposition. Along with Moser (2005: 10), “the new media highlight our feeling of being permanently in transit between different ontological consistencies of world¹⁴”.

Not less challengeable than studying the ongoing transformation of cultures under the impact of “locomotion” and “mediamotion” is studying the ongoing transformation of languages

¹⁴ In the original: « Les nouveaux médias accentuent notre sentiment d'être en permanence en transit entre différents consistances ontologiques du monde » (Moser, 2005 :10).

also retractable to the postulates of homogeneity and immutability of the system on which the immanent linguistics has been raised along the 20th century.

3. TRANSGLOSSIA: A NOTION TO THINK ABOUT LINGUISTIC CROSS-CUTS

Similar controversies to the ones that gravitate around the concept of culture as a unified and stable system gravitate as well around the concept of language. In the scope of a traditional grammar, language is reduced to the standard language and everything else that escapes from the set of prescriptions is considered error, nonstandard, barbarism, corruption, not-a-language, dialectal forms with no right to exist. In the beginning of the 20th century, the discipline of linguistics gets into the scene rewriting the history of the conception of language from a descriptive viewpoint. Such a descriptive treatment in search of apprehending from the linguistic data the objective norm, which could effectively presides the uses of language, has the power of revealing the regular, systematic and structural nature of everything that for millenniums was being condemned as error, as destruction and disorder of grammar. However, in order to disentangle the systems of uses formal linguists disguise the enterprise of defining linguistically *a* language in its whole proteiform nature. They get busy by trying to abstract out of *the* language. In order not to lose the ambivalences of *a* language – vocal and acoustic, physiological and mental, individual and social, involuntary and voluntary, static and mutant, present and past – Saussure uses the blade of the method. He dichotomizes language in two dimensions: language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*). It is this same logic that rules the dichotomy competence and performance postulated by Chomsky and adopted by his disciples in the generative-transformational framework from the second half of the 20th century.

In generativism, it is the performance that turns to be a trash can to welcome the unforeseen movement of a language being spoken and lived.

As in one model or the other, in name of categorizing of science, *the language is “extracted from a vertiginous turbulence in which emerges the speech with its social uses of the language”*¹⁵ (Camacho, 2001: 62). By cutting off the historicity, in accordance with Bakhtin (1979), the formal linguistics makes an anamnese of the philological heritage with which intended to break away. In other words, the formal linguistics studies a live language as if it was a dead language confined in a closed system dissociated from its context of use. Bakhtin (1979: 85) emphasizes that:

(. . .) it is the “dead-written-foreign” language that serves as the basis to the conception of language that emanates of the linguistic reflection. The “isolated-closed-monologic” enunciation dissociated from its real and linguistic context to which it opposes is not a potential active answer, but a passive comprehension of the philologist: this is the ultimate “datum” and the starting point of linguistic reflection¹⁶.

This posture of sterilization of live languages, pointed out by Bakhtin still in the first half of the 20th century conducts Duranti (1997: 75) to inquiry impatiently: “How to relate the abstract knowledge of the idealized members of “pure” communities to the concrete acts of linguistic performance by people who live in real communities?”

Only in the beginning of the sixties, with the Labovian sociolinguistics questioning the principle of homogeneity and invariance of the system, the heterogeneity and variation gain

¹⁵ In the original: “a língua (...) é extraída da turbulência vertiginosa em que emerge a fala com os usos sociais da linguagem” (Camacho, 2001: 62).

¹⁶ This citation has been translated into English from the Brazilian Portuguese edition of Bakhtin (1979) by the authors.

visibility and become relevant as object of study. Labov fends off the conception of language as a monolithic system postulating that heterogeneity is inherent to a speech community. If language is a system of categorical and invariant rules for the formal linguistics, it is a system of variant rules for the sociolinguistics. Every language is a mosaic, a composite of norms that are correlated to social factors. Language is not anymore a central ONE, but a juxtaposition of various separated ONES. The idea of ONE, however, is preserved.

In the discursive domain of sociolinguistics, phenomena of varieties and languages in contact or in conflict have been in the heart of discussions, investigations, and theorizations. Concepts as linguistic pluralism, linguistic diversity, multilingualism, bilingualism, diglossia, heteroglossia, among others, have been used to describe societies that comprise different languages and varieties. They capture different nuances of the phenomenon of the linguistic variation present in the communities of speech similarly to the concepts of cultural pluralism, cultural diversity, multiculturalism or interculturality.

When we talk about a society in terms of *linguistic pluralism*, we highlight the presence of many languages¹⁷ but we say nothing about the nature of each language. When we talk about linguistic diversity, we highlight the existence of many languages that are different, heterogeneous, and frequently incommensurable. We acknowledge that languages are many and qualitatively diverse. This assumption anchored the linguistically relativist posture that argues against the illuminist posture. If for the illuminists, among them, the grammarians, languages are divided in civilized and barbarian, for the relativists, among them the linguists, languages are unique, each one with its own internal structure. The relativism nurtures the discourse of the right to the difference, tolerance, and democracy in society. Also, it nurtures the preservationist discourse. When we

¹⁷ From this point, when we refer to languages, we refer as well to varieties.

talk about multilingualism, we highlight that languages are many, linguistically different, but equally structured, however unequal in the limits of a society. In other words, multilingualism situated linguistic diversity within the boundaries of the state distinguishing the majority language from the minority languages. As languages coexist within the boundaries of a state, multilingualism raises the question of equality among them. It examines if the minority languages do not receive unequal and discriminatory treatment in the public and political arena. The preoccupation with equality and non-discrimination attitudes toward the minority languages links multilingualism fundamentally to the democracy rhetoric. Democratic regimes abound in enunciations regarding non-discrimination of minorities. If the concept of linguistic diversity addresses the right toward the difference, multilingualism addresses the right to special rights for the minorities. When we talk about bilingualism and/or diglossia, we highlight the inequality that exists between two languages or varieties – one taken as high and another as low – used within the borders of a same community in diverse discursive contexts. Finally, when we talk about *heteroglossia*, we highlight the many and different voices that we hear in the speech of a singular person or social group, a phenomenon designed by Bakhtin as polyphony.

Certainly, all these concepts are useful to us to discuss the linguistic and cultural frictions in contemporary societies. Yet, we dare to attach to this constellation a new concept that we baptize *transglossia*. All the concepts above seem to presuppose the polarization between identity and alterity, the logic of entire systems, regardless of speaking about their relations. After all, in the universe of the linguistic science it is unconceivable to think in fragmented systems or in non-systems. It seems to us that it is necessary to invent a concept that grasps the life of a language in its state of flux, a life that does not stand still, that reveals itself en route. It is necessary a concept that we can think of language as liquid, not as solid, challenging the long-lasting Western tradition that, despite

Heraclites, privileged substance over movement and essence over the ongoing transformation. Recalling in the prefix *trans-*, besides the meanings of movement, transit, resounds the one of de-bordering of boundaries between languages that is what we want to grasp. Like Rushdie (1989: 04, cited in Rajagopalan, 1998: 41), who speaks of mixed men as if they were negroes, mulattoes, and whites flowing into one another and like flavors when one cooks, we want to imagine languages in contact as languages that flow into one another akin to the episode of the mestizo sign 'crique' that in 'Cuiabanês', Portuguese, and English flow into one another analogous to rivers that run along and mix indistinctively with other rivers.

RESUMO: Neste estudo, discutimos a premência de noções que possam traduzir mais adequadamente o fenômeno cotidiano da mistura de línguas e/ou dialetos intensificado na contemporaneidade pelo aumento vertiginoso das interações presenciais ou a interações midiáticas entre os povos e suas culturas, graças ao desenvolvimento de meios de transporte cada vez mais velozes e das novas tecnologias de comunicação midiática. Em analogia à noção de transculturalidade, empregada no sentido de tradução, transferência ou transporte entre fronteiras culturais, em contraposição à idéia de cultura como núcleo duro, propomos a noção de transglossia. À margem do pressuposto que afirma o primado dos sistemas lingüísticos inteiros, a noção de transglossia permite uma aproximação das línguas em seu estado de fluxo. No prefixo *trans-*, além dos sentidos de movimento, trânsito, ressoa aquele de debordamento de fronteiras entre as línguas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *transglossia; mestiçagens lingüísticas; tradução cultural.*

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