

# IS FOLK LINGUISTICS NON-HEGEMONIC?

A LINGÜÍSTICA POPULAR É NÃO HEGEMÔNICA?

¿ES LA LINGÜÍSTICA POPULAR NO HEGEMÓNICA?

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**ABSTRACT:** In this essay, we intend to reflect on Folk Linguistics as a research practice, in the field of language studies, which is part of the set of non-hegemonic practices, specifically with regard to language sciences, currently practiced in the Brazilian context. The not numerous data analyzed are produced by folk linguists, that is, by people who, although not trained in the field of language, speak metalinguistically about the dictionary process of the term Pelé, understood as a discursive event and designated by us as "Pelé in the dictionary". With less wandering, our discussion also goes through issues related to the decolonization of linguistic knowledge.

**KEYWORDS:** Folk linguistics. Non-hegemony. Decolonization of knowledge.

**RESUMO:** Neste ensaio, buscamos refletir sobre a Linguística Popular como uma prática de pesquisa, no campo de estudos da linguagem, que se inscreve no conjunto de práticas contra hegemônicas, especificamente, no que concerne às ciências da linguagem, praticadas no contexto brasileiro atualmente. Os dados analisados não numerosos são produzidos por linguistas populares, isto é, por pessoas, que embora não tenham formação no campo da linguagem, dizem metalinguisticamente sobre o processo de dicionarização do termo Pelé, entendido enquanto um acontecimento discursivo e por nós designado como "Pelé no dicionário". Com menos vagar, nossa discussão também passa por questões relacionadas à decolonização dos saberes linguísticos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Linguística popular. Contra hegemonia. Decolonização dos saberes.

**RESUMEN:** En este ensayo, pretendemos reflexionar sobre la Lingüística Popular como práctica de investigación, en el campo de los estudios del lenguaje, que se inscribe en el conjunto de prácticas contrahegemónicas, específicamente, en lo que concierne a las ciencias del lenguaje, actualmente practicadas en el contexto brasileño. Los datos analizados no son numerosos y son producidos por lingüistas populares, es decir, por personas que, a pesar de no tener formación en el campo de la lengua, dicen

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metalingüisticamente sobre el proceso de diccionarización del término Pelé, entendido como un evento discursivo, designado por nosotros como "Pelé en el diccionario". Menos vagamente, nuestra discusión pasa también por cuestiones relacionadas con la descolonización del conocimiento lingüístico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lingüística popular. Contrahegemonía. Descolonización del conocimiento.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

To positively answer the title question, we aim to discuss, in a certain way, issues related to the data and to the subject of linguistic practices in Folk Linguistics, according to terms proposed by Niedzielski and Preston (2003), Preston (2021), and Paveau (2018, 2020). Our initial hypothesis considers the possibility of analyzing folk linguistics *outside the temple*, which means far from mainstream linguistic studies, as (at least somewhat) opposed to what is conventionally referred to as *hard-science linguistics* (YNGVE; WASIK, 2006). In other words, our ambition, with all the issues it may bring, is to think of Folk Linguistics as some sort of underlying academic layer of the language sciences practiced in Brazil.

Our task, therefore, would fit into what Pardo (2019, p. 47) considered a *decolonization of knowledge*, with its recent influences in discourse studies and General Linguistics, especially in the South American context. According to the author, "reflecting on decoloniality, with regard to knowledge, encourages critical thinking about their own research, and, consequently, the creation and critical application of theories and methods" (PARDO, 2019, p. 48, our translation), as influenced by local history and geography. Our considerations also seem to converge with those of Pinto (2010, p. 69, our translation) on non-hegemonic articulations and disarticulations when examining the notions of language and linguistic practice, especially in relation to:

[...] decolonization and demodernization of how language is understood, as modern and colonial ideology have divided linguistic practices into object and its surplus, performatively inventing 'language' as a fact, and pushing practice/action out of the limits of linguistic studies.

Thus, for us, discussing Folk Linguistics in a context of non-hegemony (in relation to language studies in general) would imply facing some starting questions: answering *who are the non-linguists?* is, in a way, to solve the question about who is the subject of language, considering how it is shaped by and in discourse (would it be possible to analyze this *through* linguistic practices?); are the data, themselves, examined in Folk Linguistics (the commentary about language) already *excluded* from the treatment given by mainstream Linguistics (is that observable in linguistic practices?); recognizing Folk Linguistics as a scientific practice that is anti-exclusionary (Paveau, 2019), anti-negationist, non-hegemonic and decolonized –as it is the case in Brazil, where data comes from the periphery to the center and enables subjects that were made invisible by standard scientific criteria (would it be possible to recognize and achieve this *across* linguistic practices of different natures?).

Towards these goals and to take folk linguistics as *outside the temple* (Paveau, 2019, our translation), we have organized the text as follows: a preamble in which we examine theoretical and methodological issues on Folk Linguistics across time and within different geographies; a brief analysis of non-hegemony in language studies with a focus on discursive studies; a section dedicated to investigating manifestations by folk linguists about language; and a final section in which we discuss the place of folk linguistics within non-hegemonic studies.

## 2 FOLK ACROSS SPACE-TIME

In post-saussurean linguistics, the first contributions in folk data are commonly attributed to the work of Henry Max Hoenigswald (1915-2003), in the notorious communications from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) on folk data in Linguistics (BRIGHT, 1966). We find similar statements in Paveau (2021, p. 16), and in Niedzielski and Preston (2003, p. 2). In 1964, Hoenigswald took part in a Sociolinguistics Conference at UCLA and engaged in a "linguistics round table" GONÇALVES, 2021a in which he presented the possibility of a research blueprint for studies in Folk Linguistics.

At the end of his presentation, he directly criticized Bloomfield's position (1944) on secondary and tertiary data, pointing to the interests of the field that should reside "not only in (a) what goes on (language), but also in (b) how people react to what goes on (they are persuaded, they are put off, etc.) and in (c) what people say goes on (talk concerning language)." (HOENIGSWALD, 1966, p. 20). For Hoenigswald (1966, p. 17):

There is a habit, in itself honorable, indispensable, and deeply ingrained, of discounting informants' pronouncements on their language. In extra-linguistic matters it is enough to understand that there must be a distinction between the ideal and the real culture, whereupon the investigator is free to study each separately or even jointly. In the case of language a past unhappy history has prevented that; the necessity to warn against confusing the facts of speech with the talk about speech has been too real to allow much serious interest in the latter. Thus it has come to pass that (I am told) there exists a sizeable body of information on popular belief concerned with plant life, weather, health, even social institutions and history; there is ethno-zoology and ethno-medicine, and all these things have been subjected to study in their own right; but belief about language is different, although data are not wanting.

On that occasion, Einar Haugen (1906-1994) highlighted Hoenigswald's distancing from the research of Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949), particularly his 1944 work titled *Secondary and Tertiary Responses to Language*, in which he develops a "discussion of conventional popular statements about language" (BLOOMFIELD, 1944, p. 45). According to Haugen, "Bloomfield's attitude to these reactions was definitely negative" (HOENIGSWALD, 1966, p. 21).

Why did Bloomfield discard folk manifestations about language from linguistic research? Let us see what Bloomfield (1944, p. 45) says:

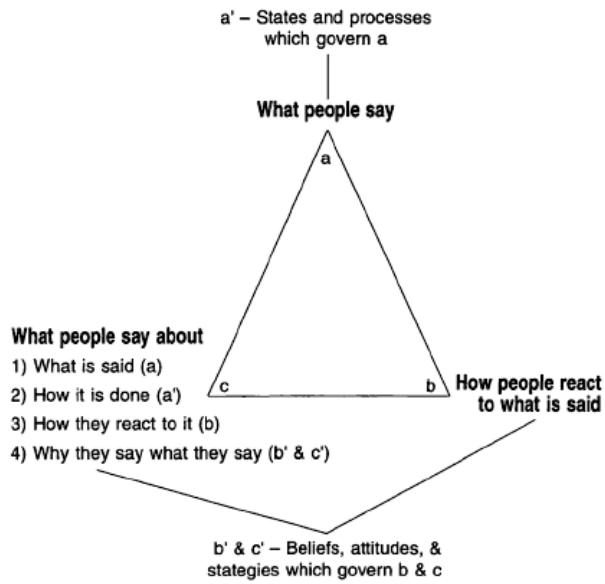
On other than a scientific level, our culture maintains a loosely organized but fairly uniform system of pronouncements about language. Deviant speech forms in dialects other than the standard dialect are described as corruptions of the standard forms ('mistakes', 'bad grammar') or branded as entirely out of bounds, on a par with the solecisms of a foreign speaker ('not English'). The forms of the standard dialect are justified on grounds of 'logic'. Either on the strength of logical consistency or in pursuance of largely conventional authoritative rules, which constitute a minor tradition within the main one (for instance, the rules about shall and will), certain forms are theoretically prescribed for the standard dialect. When it is noticed that speakers of the standard dialect do not use these forms or use others beside them, these deviations are again branded as 'mistakes' or, less often, attributed to 'usage', which appears here only as a special and limited factor, mentioned doubtfully as interfering with more legitimate controls.

For Bloomfield (1944, p. 45-48), these non-linguists are often considered ignorant ("some ignorant people") or "savage" as opposed to specialists ("professional student of language") and would have little to contribute to linguistic studies, *strictu sensu*.

Years later, Dell Hymes (1927-2009), who participated in the conference in 1964, was propagating Hoenigswald's ideas about research in Folk Linguistics. In 1974, Hymes published his *Studies in the History of Linguistics: Traditions and Paradigms* (HYMES, 1974), with a passage dedicated to Folk Linguistics. In the 1980s, the text was republished as a chapter within the *Essays in the History of Linguistic Anthropology* collection (see HYMES, 1983). For Hymes, data from reflections on the language produced by average speakers should be integrated into research.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the book *Folk Linguistics* by Nancy Niedzielski and Dennis Preston (NIEDZIELSKI; PRESTON, 2003) is published, certainly one of the most relevant publications in American Folk Linguistics. In its preface, the researchers present the proposed model for studies in Folk Linguistics<sup>1</sup>, initially elaborated from the three questions previously proposed by Hoenigswald for the specified field.

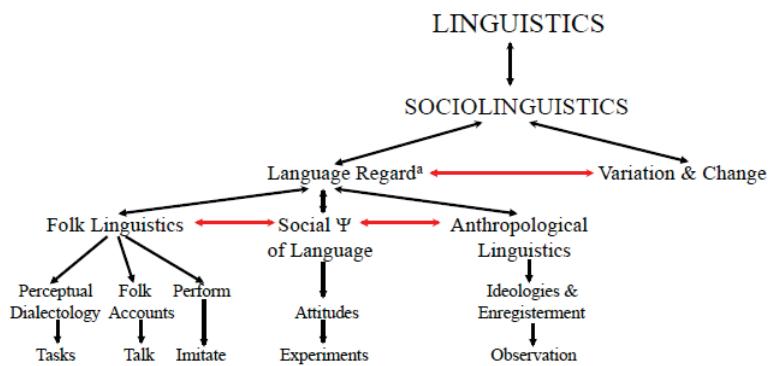
<sup>1</sup> In the new model, the suggested change, which takes place in the conceptualization of a continuum at the base of the triangle from Figure 1 (from *c* to *b* to *b1* to *bn*), better reflects the passage from conscious reactions and comments about language to totally unconscious reactions about language. In these terms, Folk Linguistics (the speakers' eventual beliefs, attitudes, and strategies) would be fully placed at the vertex *b1*.



**Figure 1:** The place of Folk Linguistics in the general study of language.

Source: NIEDZIELSKI; PRESTON, 2003, p. 26

More recently, during a short course offered at the II International Seminar on Studies in Folk Linguistics (II SIELiPop), Preston talked about the relationships among Folk Linguistics, Sociolinguistics and Perceptual Dialectology, proposing the following tree diagram about the research field:



**Figure 2:** Folk Linguistics.

Source: PRESTON, 2023

Preston (2011, p. 15) discusses using the term “folk” in linguistic studies:

I also most emphatically use the term folk in folk linguistics to refer to all persons except academic linguists, just as linguists would be folk in a study of folk botany, folk chemistry, etc... I definitely do not use the term to refer to rural, marginalized, less educated, or romanticized ('quaint') groups. We're all folk when we step into the world of traditional knowledge and ways of behaving outside our own technical training. Even then, folk knowledge may be at work when more subconscious modes prevail, although, as in the language attitudes of linguists, for example, they may be suppressed from overt comment or behavior by professional knowledge.

As for Folk Linguistics methodologies, especially from data collection and analysis techniques points of views, Preston (2011, p. 15) brought up different approach techniques, characterized as traditional, operational, experimental and discursal. As for discourse approaches, Preston (2011, p. 34) focused his efforts on the metalinguistic content of a conversation about speech, reviewing

strategies that could reveal subconscious attitudes - topic selection in imitation, referential specificity in argument, discourse markers, topic perspectives and speaker-hearer footing.

It so happens that there is another geographical domain, in addition to North America, in which studies in Folk Linguistics gained prominence. Paveau (2008), in the French journal *Pratiques*, has established at least three domains for Folk Linguistics (PAVEAU, 2020, p. 16-17): the Anglo-Saxon domain of Folk Linguistics; the *Volkslinguistik* or *Laienlinguistik* domain, within the Germanic context; and the French and Francophone domain of Folk Linguistics.

Inspired by the opposition that Brekle (1984) proposed between language practices and linguistic practices within the scope of folk linguistics, Paveau (2018) organizes the field of studies by establishing four types of linguistic practices carried out by non-specialists, non-linguists, or simply folk linguists. Folk linguistics is concerned with linguistic practices and not with language practices. Paveau (2020) distinguishes the former, which always involve a metalinguistic activity, from the latter, which simply refer to language use.

While Linguistics as a science privileges the study of common people's language usage, Folk Linguistics encompasses linguistic practices and the production of knowledge about language by non-linguists. This knowledge cannot be refuted or proven; they function as beliefs that motivate certain actions. According to Paveau (2020), linguistic practices can be descriptive in nature (e.g., specialized lexicons of social groups, tribes, etc. circulating in communication networks); normative (e.g., statements that follow the formula of the *appendix probi <dizer>* vs. *<não dizer>* (meaning *<correct>* vs. *<incorrect>*), as in *<gente>* vs. *<não gente>*; interventionist (e.g., using the neologism *<sextar>* to announce the upcoming weekend, using a verb that fits within the first conjugation paradigm, the most productive within the grammar system for Portuguese) and militant (e.g., saying *<homossexualidade>* instead of *<não homossexualismo>*, or *<escravizado>* instead of *<não escravo>*)<sup>2</sup>.

In this proposal, in addition to the descriptive, normative, interventionist and militant practices, there is also a suggestion for the categorization of these (non-)linguist agents in a gradient that starts from the professional linguist (us) and ends at the non-linguists, going through proofreaders and editors, writers, essayists, ludolinguists, children, etc. (PAVEAU, 2020b; BONERMANN; COX, 2019). There are, therefore, two opposing poles representing the theoretical extremes: on one extremity, the "erudite", "scientific" linguist, who handles "exact" knowledge; and, on the other, the spontaneous linguist (PAVEAU, 2018, p. 9-10).

Even considering the publication of Paveau (2018), in Brazil the arrival of what we call Folk Linguistics is more recent as a field of research in linguistics compared to other locations, such as North America and France. We highlight here, mainly, two recent milestones: the publication in this same journal of the *Linguística Popular/Folk Linguistics* report (BARONAS; COX, 2019) and the organization of both editions of the International Seminars on Studies in Folk Linguistics (SIELiPop) which took place in 2020 and 2023 at the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar).

In the Brazilian context (PAVEAU, 2020, p. 7), Folk Linguistics does not yet figure as an officially institutionalized research field among linguistic sciences associations in Brazil or among research funding agencies across the country. However, considering most recent works, we can attest an advance in discursive approaches that analyze the folk linguistics data in circulation, especially in digital media, with focus on descriptive, militant and identity linguistic practices.

Brazilian Folk Linguistics, besides working on the continuum proposed by Paveau (2018, 2020) which consists of an anti-exclusionary viewpoint between scientific linguistics and lay linguistics, seeks to understand, on the one hand, how metalinguistic knowledge (meta-enunciative, metadiscoursal) is constructed by the subjects and, on the other hand, how this knowledge is shared by and among the members of a given community.

<sup>2</sup> Equivalent comparisons for English would be *<homosexuality>* vs. *<homosexualism>*, and *<enslaved person>* vs. *<slave>*.

### 3 FOLK LINGUISTICS AND NON-HEGEMONY

The comments we intend to make on Folk Linguistics and its relations with non-hegemonic theories in language studies in this section have their roots in at least three different works, all of them focusing on discourse studies. The first of them was realized by Pardo (2019, p. 47), who performs a “critical study on the colonization of knowledge in the field of discourse studies” and indicates evidence as to how themes, theories and methods are (or need to be) considered in language studies within the South American context.

In the second one, Paveau (2023, p. 162) presents the contributions derived from the notions of intersectionality and decoloniality to the discourse theories, which she calls a non-hegemonic discourse analysis. And on the third study, Pinto (2010, p. 69, our translation) “examines the notion of ‘language’ through the lens of a critical set of non-hegemonic studies on [...] language”.

### 4 COULD FOLK LINGUISTICS BE NON-HEGEMONIC?

The first comment we would like to highlight here concerns an objection to what could be designated as primitive to Folk Linguistics, perhaps a central question in the very composition of the field: the issue about data in linguistics. This argument consists, among other reasons, in rejecting folk data either because it is collected/voiced by a non-specialist, or because it lacks an adequate vocabulary (metalanguage) for *discussing* language. This rejection, already expressed by Bloomfield in the 1940s and by Labov during his own “round table” with Hoegninswald in 1964, is explained by Preston (2003, p. 3) as the impoverishment of data.

This Bloomfieldian-Labovian objection indicates a kind of epistemological repulsion of folk data, misaligning it with doing traditional, hard, mainstream science inside the temple. For this epistemological current, the valued linguistic data are those endorsed by a linguistic theory, regardless of whether these data are originated by an *ideal speaker*, a kind of *avatar avant la lettre*, completely impervious to the society they belong to.

However, the results indicate that such data, within Folk Linguistics, can greatly contribute not only to a specific discussion on the relationship between sociolinguistics and dialectology – and their relationships with the discursive field –, but also to a broader discussion within a general theory of language studies, or even for social sciences in general, as in anthropology, for instance. Preston (2023) and others indicate richness in this sense, as is the case of Koops; Gentry; Pantos (2008), Baronas;Conti (2019 ) and Gonçalves (2021b). Furthermore, as Paveau tells us (2020, p. 132):

Considering, in the linguistic work itself, the metadiscourses of common people, who incorporate their life experiences, their points of view, their moral positions, their political situations and everything that makes up their lives, allows linguistics to get out of the logocentrism that deprives it of depths within its subjects' lives (the linguistics of enunciation, stopping at the doors of their lives, precisely). The full integration of the speaker's speech conditions into the linguistic practices, being them from the corpora producers or from their analysts, allows starting the program of a postlinguistics that respects the environments of the people who speak and the words they use.

The second comment (or question), observed from the different linguistic practices in Brazil, indicates the de-peripheralization of Brazilian speaking subjects, pointing to our themes, our *motives*...

Folk Linguistics, by bringing to the center of the debate the metadiscourses of common people about their language and the languages of others, and, moreover, how this knowledge is shared by the members of a given community, places the subjects producing these discourses as co-participants in the production of knowledge, understanding the latter as the concrete possibility of social change. These subjects are no longer objects of knowledge (their language at different levels and functions), but rather the co-authors of this knowledge, whose primary objective is not to describe, explain or interpret linguistic functioning, but to change society, through their linguistic practices.

In this direction, we can mention a sample of a militant practice: *Aurelia Dictionary: the sharp-tongued dictionary*<sup>3</sup>, by journalists Vitor Angelo Scippe and Fred Libi, published in 2006 by Editora Bispa<sup>4</sup>. It is a metaphor of sorts about the knowledge shared by the LGBTQIA+ community, which aims to demonstrate that it is more than a simple dictionary – a technology that instrumentalizes a certain linguistic variety and showing its subaltern condition in relation not only to what would be the standard norm or to other prestige varieties, or a symbol of nationality. *Aurélia* constitutes a militant discourse about the language of the LGBTQIA+ community.

This work establishes a way of saying that implies the manifestation of its own interlanguage (a specific language code, a style of the LGBTQIA+ community), but without imposing a standard to be followed, as the cultural norm does, for instance, nor presenting itself as an ironclad language, hermetic, inaccessible to those outside of the community. Over and above that, *Aurélia* encourages this modeling of the pattern to get out of order, proposing in its place the possibility of inaugurating a world that reveals itself in the very act of inauguration, that is, the importance and even the need to show the way you see it. Furthermore, strictly speaking, *Aurélia* has no natural relationship with any linguistic usage; even when the work seems to use a language which can be considered *foul* or *pejorative* within our Puritan imaginary, there is always a confrontation with the alterity of language, linked to a determined position in the field of linguistic instruments and, consequently, of language itself.

## 5 IS FOLK LINGUISTICS DECOLONIZED?

Before answering about folk linguistics and the relationship with the decolonization of knowledge, the question that is often asked about this field of knowledge is its validity: is the knowledge on which Folk Linguistics is based or that it produces objective and worthy of being considered by the linguistic science?<sup>5</sup> This question is essential and has been asked, among other times, by Paveau (2008). However, this kind of epistemological question eclipses others, perhaps more important: what is Folk Linguistics for? Does it play an important role in society? Or is it another domain/subdomain within linguistic studies, alien to everything that goes on in our society? Just one more discipline that needs advocates to fight for inclusion and acceptance among Linguistic science organizations across the world?

We understand that in addition to bringing to the center of the debate all these important questions, which would supposedly be resolved within the scope of scientific linguistics, Folk Linguistics creates a nuisance in the knowledge produced by the language sciences by showing, on the one hand, that specialization is not the only criterion to be taken into account for knowledge to be accepted as valid or not and, on the other hand, referencing back to the metaphor of the underlying layer, the data produced by folk linguists, despite the difficulties of being collected objectively, not only come before the data from linguists, are plentiful and very rich, and can help linguistics itself to elucidate various phenomena. In this sense, it is possible to confidently affirm that Folk Linguistics can be understood as belonging to the scope of decolonial studies. Such a conviction does not have to extend only to the themes of Folk Linguistics, but above all to its own constitution.

<sup>3</sup> “Aurélia: a dicionária da língua afiada”.

<sup>4</sup> It is the first Portuguese dictionary that gathers words and expressions used by the LGBTQIA+ community, extracted from *Pajubá*, which has an African background and presents itself as the language used in the gay scene throughout Brazil. *Aurélia* is a result of extensive research by the authors, which names functions as a reference, perhaps even as a parody, of the traditional *Aurélia*, the most famous Portuguese dictionary. The 143-pages volume contains 1,300 entries, with their full descriptions, formatted as a traditional dictionary. The entries that make up *Aurélia* were collected from all regions of Brazil, and, according to the authors, expressions and words from Portugal and other countries in the Portuguese world were also included. The book presents the formal classification of word classes used by conventional dictionaries: nouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc., as well as the geographical origin of words and expressions.

<sup>5</sup> See the book *Linguística popular, práticas, proposições polêmicas: homenagem a Amadeu Amaral*, the chapter titled “Linguística ingênua” by José Borges Neto.

## 6 ANALYZING DESCRIPTIVE PRACTICES

Carrying out an analysis of the militant linguistic practices propagated by folk linguists seems less problematic than an analysis of descriptive practices. We could round numerous events up for defending this premise<sup>6</sup>, however, considering the limitations, we will restrict ourselves to what appears to be some sort of metonymic representation that lay linguists understand a lot about football and the language. I am not referring here to sports journalists or commentators in general, who dedicate themselves to the football *métier*, covering the many football championships, but to the average individual, the guy who daily struggles to keep his head above water, balancing plates of all shapes and sizes.

We want to start by referring specifically to a comment made by an internet user, who, after reading the article published on the Brazilian website UOL titled (“Pelé becomes an entry in the Michaelis dictionary: “one who is out of the ordinary”)<sup>7</sup>, he said:



Pelé no dia de sua chegada à Vila Belmiro,  
em Santos, em 8 de agosto de 1956

Pelé vira verbete  
do dicionário  
Michaelis: 'Aquele  
que é fora do  
comum'

Figure 3: UOL publishes about Pelé

Source: UOL, 2023

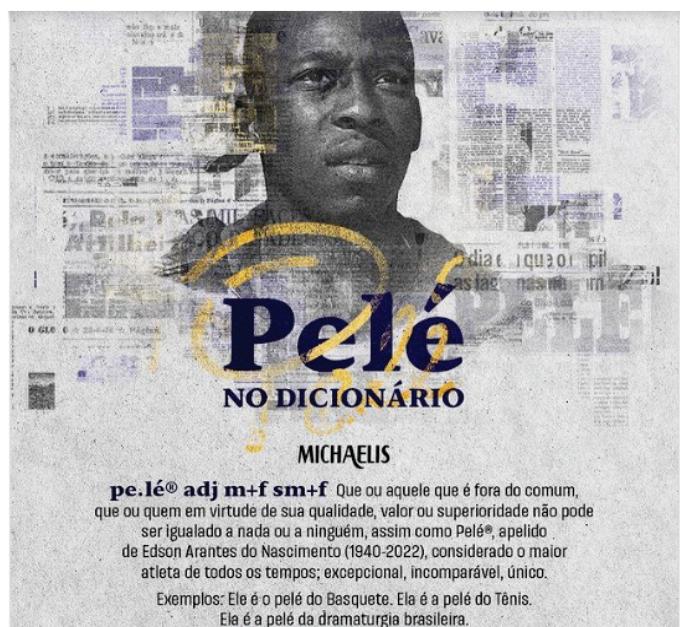
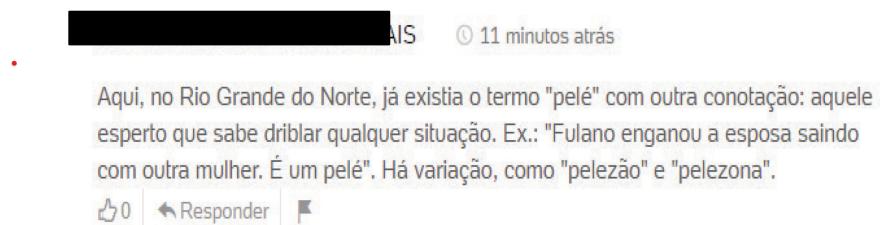


Figure 4: Pelé in the dictionary

Source: Pelé's Instagram.

<sup>6</sup> A quick search on Google gives us 44.600 occurrences for the query “Pelé dicionarizado” (“Pelé in the dictionary”).

<sup>7</sup> “Pelé vira verbete do dicionário Michaelis: aquele que é fora do comum”.



**Figure 5:** Pelé with another connotation

**Source:** UOL, 2023

The internet user's metalinguistic comment, a metaphor of sorts about the linguistic knowledge of a certain social group: "Here, in Rio Grande do Norte, the term 'pelé' already existed with another connotation", is very pertinent, as it adds to the entry *Pelé*, in addition to the meaning proposed by Michaelis, "one who is out of the ordinary" another meaning, namely, one who is clever, or resourceful. We apply no moral judgment/canceling toward the example mentioned by the internet user. In addition, this internet user talks about the variations *pelezão* and *pelezona*<sup>8</sup>. This data, as simple as it may seem, together with the dictionary entry, shows us that Pelé, a kind of nickname that identifies the greatest player of all time, is also a linguistic event (Guilhaumou, 2009), as it shows how speaking subjects, based on their metalinguistic knowledge, mobilize the linguistic instruments available to legitimize their linguistic innovations.

Linguists Henrique Braga and Marcelo Módulo, in a news article titled "Pelé: a conceptual metaphor"<sup>9</sup>, published in the newspaper O Globo on 12/31/22, a few days after the athlete's death, express that (our translation):

In the process of linguistic change in which the proper noun Pelé becomes a common noun, a conceptual metaphor occurs. Football is taken as the source domain, and, in this universe, the concrete element "Pelé" refers to exuberance, strength, splendor, technical quality and, above all, superiority. Then, in the chosen target domain, the same properties are attributed to another subject: by saying that Machado de Assis is the pelé of Brazilian literature, the superiority verified in the domain of football is transferred to the literature domain. For a group of young students who had not yet come into contact with the Sorcerer but who already knew the legendary King, the metaphor would be a discursive resource to show the dimension of the greatness of our greatest author.

Braga and Módulo (2022, p. 01), based on Cognitive Linguistics, argue, on the one hand, that the conversion of the proper noun *Pelé* into a common noun *pelé* is the result of a process of linguistic change and, on the other hand, that this process can be understood as a conceptual metaphor: "Football is taken as the source domain [...] the concrete element 'Pelé' refers to exuberance, strength [...] and, above all, superiority. Then, in the chosen target domain, the same properties are assigned to another subject..."

The authors end their text talking about the absence of the term *Pelé* in Portuguese language dictionaries, as well as its merit in being registered (2022, our translation):

#### **A dictionary entry?**

Among specialists, it is already a consensus that the dictionary does not define whether a term "exists" or "does not exist". Rather, the work of lexicographers is able to formally document the words that make up the vernacular of a community of speakers.

In the case of the common noun *pelé*, neither the main dictionaries nor the Vocabulary issued by the Academia Brasileira de Letras (Brazilian Academy of Letters) register the term. Allowing us a guess, however, it is a matter of time: it is a productive, recurrent term, which already integrates the Brazilian varieties of Portuguese. In short, it is a term worth mentioning.

<sup>8</sup> In Portuguese, *pelezão* is an intensified version of *Pelé*, while *pelezona* is an intensified and gender-specific version of the same term, applicable for a woman.

<sup>9</sup> "Pelé: uma metáfora conceitual."

The internet user's comment goes exactly in the direction of what the linguists claim in their text: "it is a productive, recurrent term, which already integrates the Brazilian varieties of Portuguese". In other words, even before the Michaelis dictionary (another popular Brazilian dictionary) had included the term *Pelé*, not only defining it as the greatest football player of all time, but including other meanings, this entry was already registered in the discourse memory of Brazilian Portuguese speakers. What the dictionary did was record it on a linguistic instrument.

Next, we will focus on another piece of data, this time the article "Pelé in the dictionary"<sup>10</sup>, published on the Brazilian website UOL within journalist Juca Kfouri's blog page, on April 27, authored by Luiz Guilherme Piva:

#### POR LUIZ GUILHERME PIVA

A campanha para dicionarizar o nome Pelé é mais do que elogável. Um dos grandes dicionários - o Michaelis - saiu na frente dos seus concorrentes e já incluiu. "Fulano(a) é o(a) Pelé disso ou daquilo..."; não só nos esportes, mas em todas as atividades.

Na verdade, essa é uma condição que existiu desde antes do nada, como no calendário do Nelson Rodrigues. Na música, na carpintaria, na navegação, na agricultura, no xadrez, em qualquer atividade humana, de raro em raro surge alguém que a desempenha de maneira muito acima da excelência; de forma, digamos, sobre-humana.

Existe uma grande discussão (tudo bem, sou só eu com os meus botões, mas eles são teimosos) acerca da classificação gramatical do termo: adjetivo, substantivo, substantivo adjetivado, etc.

Acho que será sempre um substantivo, ainda mais quando antecedido pelos artigos "o" ou "a": "o Pelé da música", "a Pelé da física quântica", etc. Poderá ser um quase adjetivo, ou substantivo adjetivado, vá lá, se dispensar o artigo: "fulano(a) é Pelé!", ou "sicrano(a) é Pelé demais!"; beltrano(a) é Pelé na capoeira!", etc.

Deixo para lá meus botões e suas exegeses morfológicas. O que importa é outra coisa na dicionarização de Pelé.

É a heresia de fazê-lo com a inicial minúscula, pecado que o primeiro dicionário já cometeu.

Todos os manuais obrigam o uso de maiúscula neste caso, seja por se tratar de substantivo próprio, seja, sobretudo, pelo devido respeito. Como resume o Manual da Folha de S. Paulo: "Deus/deus - Escreva com maiúscula (...) quando designar o ser transcendente, único e perfeito das religiões monoteístas"

Figure 6: Juca Kfouri's blog page

Source: UOL, 2023

Unlike the previous data, in this one, we initially have a journalist questioning the grammatical classification of the term *Pelé*. "There is great discussion [...] about the grammatical classification of the term as either adjective, noun, adjectival noun [...] I think it (*Pelé*) will always be a noun. Even more so when preceded by articles [...]" The journalist then questions Michaelis's usage of the lowercase letter at the beginning of the term *pelé*: "[...] the heresy of doing it with the initial in lowercase, a sin that the first dictionary has already committed". Here the relationship with religious discourse is explicit. In other words, in the imagination of the article's author, functioning as a metaphor for the understanding of most people in the "homeland of football boots", *Pelé* is a God, a deity of football, and spelling him with a lowercase initial letter is the same as committing sacrilege.

<sup>10</sup> "Pelé dicionarizado."

That being the case, it seems to us that the signifier is understood as the thing itself. The relationship here is not one of meaning, but rather one of identification between the word and the element. In this sense, if for Christians the bread and wine do not represent the body and blood of Jesus, since they are the very body and blood of the Messiah, that is, there is not an implied metaphorical relationship, but a metonymic one, in this way, if Pelé is a God and God is spelled with a capital letter, so *Pelé* must be spelled with a capital letter. Here, the issue of respect for Pelé as a God speaks louder than the issue of the entry's own discursive genre.

Furthermore, there is another issue that seems relevant for us to point out, which is the relationship between writing and orality. In this sense, when criticizing the dictionary for the use of the initial in lower case for the term *pelé* and elevating this use to the condition of sin, the author – also subscribed to the social imaginary of the written language as a place of respect – confirms the value that writing has in our society to the detriment of orality. There is no need to list here the set of proverbs and other small phrases cataloged within our cultural thesaurus and that attest the value writing has in our society.<sup>11</sup>

## 7 CONCLUSION – FOLK LINGUISTICS IS NON-HEGEMONIC

As a child, back in 1977, in the countryside of the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, more specifically in the town of Erechim, one of us experienced a situation that may seem like a tall tale. However, it is the purest expression of truth. At the time, my cousin Márcio (nicknamed *Saci*) and I used to play football, every day after our class – *goalie*, as we used to call it – in a small field in a vacant property, right below the football field that belonged to Atlético do Linho, the local football team that represented our neighborhood. After our matches, we religiously went to watch the team during their training. Back then, one player called our attention, Walmir: an athlete with little technique, but a lot of effort and who, every time the coach went to distribute the shirts, demanded: - “If you hand me the number 10 shirt, I'll even play in the goal!” Not rarely, when the Atlético do Linho team posed for photos before matches for the city championship, regardless of his lineup in the team, Walmir would have his back turned to show the number 10 shirt. This episode reinforces that Pelé, the owner of a number 10 shirt himself, and the greatest of all football players, is a “dictionary entry” *avant la lettre*, built by the speakers, since becoming prominent in the Brazilian scenario.

This short story and our brief analysis attest that long before Pelé's death, on December 29, 2022, countless speakers had already transformed the noun/nickname Pelé into an adjective: “Someone or something out of the ordinary, which by virtue of their own quality, value or superiority cannot be equaled to anything or anyone, just like Pelé could not”. This grammatical class change, in addition to building linguistic memory for Pelé, whether in relation to the sense of *out of the ordinary* or *the smart, astute one* as a qualifier for something or someone, shows us, in more theoretical terms, that this is a moment of emergence for singular forms of subjectivation, which occur at the crossroads between linguistic knowledge and practice, induced by the subjects and shared by the members of a given community.

The data mobilized by folk linguists about turning the term *Pelé* into a dictionary entry truly speaks of our identity as Brazilians, namely our umbilical relationship with issues related to football. In no other country in the world is the sport so constitutive of its people as it is in Brazil. Studying these relationships within the scope of language seems to us to be a clear piece of evidence that Folk Linguistics is non-hegemonic.

<sup>11</sup> In another context and with a practice contrary to that proposed by the journalist, but which reiterates how present the respect for written language is in our imaginary, the writer Valter Hugo Mäe in “his first four novels that became known as the tetralogy of lowercase letters, since all the books, including the author's name, are written without capital letters. Its objective was to value the oral nature of the texts and bring literature closer to thought”.

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