



Orthography matters!: the ideologies, insecurities and global politics of the 1990 Portuguese Language Orthographic Agreement

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores linguistic ideologies surrounding *The 1990 Portuguese Language Orthographic Agreement*. The reform, which aims to uniformize Lusophone orthographies and strengthen Portuguese as a global language, is approached through the reactions of native speakers participating in an online debate within a Portuguese-language blog. Drawing on the notion that language planning is a personal, political and ideological rather than a purely linguistic enterprise, the study focuses on the social meanings assigned to Portuguese orthography by the Lusophone debaters. Upon so doing, it tracks the different ideologies orienting participants' arguments for or against the reform, showing the interplays of language ideologies with culture, nation and citizenship; how linguistic practices and language-mediating technologies, like orthography, become sites of ideological (re)production; and how "folk" and "expert" perspectives about language are not distant but rather dialectically inform and implicate one another, with local debate discourses embedded within broader and older social process and relations.

A ortografia importa!: as ideologias, inseguranças e políticas globais do Acordo Ortográfico da Língua Portuguesa de 1990

Este trabalho explora ideologias linguísticas em torno do Acordo Ortográfico da Língua Portuguesa de 1990. A reforma, que pretende uniformizar as ortografias lusófonas e fortalecer o português como idioma global, é abordada através das reações de falantes nativos que participam de um debate on-line em um blog da língua portuguesa. Baseando-se na noção de que a planificação linguística é uma iniciativa pessoal, política e ideológica e não puramente linguística, este estudo traça os significados sociais atribuídos à ortografia portuguesa pelos debatedores lusófonos. Ao fazer isso, acompanham-se as diferentes ideologias que orientam os participantes a favor ou contra a reforma, demonstrando as interações das ideologias linguísticas com noções de cultura, nação e cidadania; como as práticas linguísticas e tecnologias de mediação da linguagem, como ortografia, tornam-se locais de (re)produção ideológica;

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e como perspectivas “populares” e também “especialistas” sobre linguagem não são distantes, mas sim dialeticamente informam e implicam umas às outras, com discursos locais incorporados em processos e relações sociais mais amplos e antigos.

1. Introduction: the global significance of Portuguese and the sociolinguistic context of the 1990 orthographic agreement

Long before the emergence of English onto the international stage as a global language, Portuguese dominated as a medium of international commerce and wider communication. Once limited to the small nation of Portugal on the Iberian peninsula, alongside its Galician sister language, the Portuguese tongue expanded its domains of use during the Age of Exploration and Discovery in the 15th and 16th centuries when its speakers led the world in overseas navigation.

Through exploration, Portuguese became a language of intercultural communication (*lingua franca*) used for trade and commerce as well as a socially dominant language for colonial administration in countless territories across the continents of Africa, Asia, America and Oceania. Moreover, the intercultural and interlinguistic encounters created by Portuguese overseas exploration, exploitation and expansion into new contexts gave rise to linguistic differentiation and divergence and the formation of new Lusophone contact languages, among them local colonial varieties or subdialects of Portuguese and even Portuguese-lexified creoles.

The Portuguese empire gradually dissolved into sovereign states over the course of the next four to five centuries, and despite several modifications in writing conventions, Bueno (1967, cited in Garcez 1993) explains that, “the orthography of the Portuguese language developed all the way to 1911 without any [successful] official interference, either from the government or from the Academies” (48). However, in 1911 and without consulting with the Brazilian government or its language codifiers (i.e., The Brazilian Academy of Language and Literature), Portugal adopted novel writing conventions under a reform known as the *New Orthography*. This orthographic decision was viewed unfavorably and as a political albeit non-diplomatic move in Brazil, where the “prevailing ... opinion was that Portugal had created a schism between the two countries” (Castro et al. 1987, cited in Garcez 1993, 50). This move incited decades of orthographic discord, debates and negotiations around orthographic uniformization over the course of the twentieth century, and multiple, albeit unsuccessful, reform attempts were made to standardize the two orthographies.

With two separate writing systems in place for Portuguese-official polities since 1911, orthographic diversity has been seen as an impediment to the international Lusophone language situation, in particular, the global integrity and prestige of Portuguese (cf. Garcez 1993).¹ Furthermore, with the mid-1970s independence of the Portuguese-official African states, concerns of further linguistic divergence and disintegration of the international Lusophone community have become particularly apparent, likely to only have been heightened by the newly achieved independence of East Timor in 2002.²

Notwithstanding, Portuguese has maintained its supranational status. Although its current functions vary by context (cf. Garcez 1993), Portuguese is one of the world's most widely used languages. At present, Portuguese is the official (and co-official) language of ten states (nine countries together with the Macau region of China), with Equatorial Guinea added to the list in 2010. Since the *New Orthography* of 1911, two orthographic standards have existed for all Lusophone (Portuguese-official) polities, with one norm utilized in Brazil and the other applying to the remaining Lusophone states.

Finally, on 12 October 1990, representatives from Portugal and Brazil as well as delegations from Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe approved the *Acordo Ortográfico da Língua Portuguesa de 1990* ("The 1990 Portuguese Language Orthographic Agreement;" hereafter, *AOLP*), with accession from observers from Galicia. On 16 December 1990, the *AOLP* was signed by representatives from the seven countries and was posteriorly approved by East Timor in 2004 after obtaining sovereignty. Language prestige promotion, language unification and phonemic principles are the defined criteria underpinning the orthographic reform as identified by language planners within the Agreement. The *AOLP* proposes to phoneticize some spellings (e.g., removing certain silent consonants) and – while recognizing two spelling variants for some words – aims to partially unify the two orthographies to boost the international status of Portuguese (Da Silva and Gunnewiek 1992). It affects 0.45 percent of words in the Brazilian orthographic norm and approximately 1.6 percent of words in the Lusitanian norm (Rattner 1992, cited in Garcez 1993). It furthermore orthographically unifies approximately 98 percent of the general vocabulary of Portuguese.

With no unanimous deadline established for the execution of *AOLP*, ratification and implementation of the reform have proceeded incongruously in signatory countries. As an example, Brazil and Portugal ratified the *AOLP* separately in 2008 and implemented the new conventions at different points in 2009; however, whereas Portugal provided a six-year transitional period during which both norms would coexist, Brazil planned to transition over four years. Ultimately, however, the new conventions became obligatory in Portugal in May 2015, as planned, but were only enforced in Brazil on 1 January 2016, three years after originally anticipated. Many other Portuguese-official states have demonstrated reluctance in ratifying the Agreement and, to date, have yet to implement the new conventions. Thus, the uniformized orthography signed into law more than two and a half decades ago has only recently become mandatory in certain signatory countries and has, meanwhile and since then, remained a source of much contention among politicians, language planners, and – having become the object of academic inquiry – academics as well. Moreover, these discussions have extended beyond the domain of scholarly interest to inform public opinion and join the repertoire of native speakers, who can now also be seen as taking stances within a longstanding debate about Portuguese orthography and an enduring historical episode amongst Portuguese-official states.

This paper contributes to the sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological scholarship by focusing on a language, which for its historical and current global significance, remains underrepresented in the sociocultural linguistics literature. Moreover, by attending to language's non-referential functions and turning attention to emic theories and native-speaker perspectives of language, the present article explores both local arguments surrounding this case of orthographic reform and what they reveal about broader, more global ideologies of language and social processes. I take an ideological

approach to writing systems (Sebba 1998), treating orthography as “the site of potentially intense struggles over identity and power” (20) and exploring the intersections between language ideologies and a multitude of sociocultural notions and symbolic values assigned according to native speakers engaging in a debate within a Portuguese language blog. Here, I use language ideologies to both speak of “the cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine 1989, 255), and “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein 1979, 193). In particular, the community reactions presented here take for granted that writing conventions matter (at multiple levels of society) and thus that LPP, rather than purely linguistic, is very much a cultural, political and personal undertaking of greater consequence than the immediate issue of an orthography. The series of discursive exchanges I examine constantly signal the larger sociocultural embedding, import and implications of this reform as well as articulate, reproduce and contest beliefs and assumptions about language. As such, they constitute a classic example of a language ideological debate (Blommaert 1999).

Grounding this study in the language ideology and socio-semiotic literatures, I explore how (ideologically-mediated) language becomes socially significant, i.e., how interrelated semiotic processes (Irvine and Gal 2000) imbue orthography with social meanings that orient Lusophone debaters for or against the reform. In particular, I apply a language ideological approach in concert with a fine-grained thematic discourse analysis (cf. Johnson 2005; Milani 2010) to pinpoint the logics used in local arguments surrounding the *AOLP* and, from there, trace them to the broader ideologies underpinning them and their paralinguistic values. I attend to these meanings in my analysis, identifying three underlying themes about language and orthography in online debates:

- (1) Orthographic reform as a threat to writing and speech
- (2) Orthographic reform as a threat to notions of selfhood, peoplehood and political relations
- (3) Orthographic reform as a threat to cultural capital

Though at times seeming contradictory, in tandem, these discourses enforce a notion of orthography as important (culturally, personally, politically) by invoking sentiments and logics that arise during processes of orthographic reform. Since ideologies are historical products, and debates that center upon them are links in a grander chain of sociocultural processes, I show that these discourses can be linked to theoretical traditions in language studies and to a larger embedding episode amongst Portuguese-official polities that now evokes anxieties and concerns about globalization and (supranational) unity, modernization and the future in the face of language standardization and spread. Ultimately, the thematic discourses surrounding orthography and the *AOLP* described herein form a framework to be applied more broadly beyond Portuguese in understanding how people think about and ideologize language.

Shortly, I will attend to those meanings, but first I will review the scholarship concerning the politics of language-representational practices and language-mediating technologies like writing to better situate this research.

2. Previous explorations of language-representational and mediating practices

Early in the history of American dialect studies, Krapp (1925) introduced the concept of “eye dialect” to describe a literary device used to dichotomize standard and nonstandard varieties, thereby illustrating how spelling conventions participate in politics of similarity/difference. In nearly the century since his publication, numerous scholars of language and society have taken to further interrogating how a multitude of linguistic practices and language-mediating technologies become sites of ideological articulation, reproduction or contestation. The import of each work within this research genre has been its ability to pinpoint local linguistic enactments and trace them to larger, more enduring scales of meaning and social action. Among this branch of scholarly inquiry, a significant body of sociocultural linguistic literature attends to the political or interest-laden aspects of devising an orthography (Bermel 2007; Schieffelin and Doucet 1994). Thus, Neely and Palmer (2009) consider a situation of extreme orthographic variation in Oklahoma, where the language-ideological promotion of multiple orthographies (*heterographia*) complicates language revitalization efforts among the Kiowa people. Similarly, Johnson (2005) explores the 1996 German spelling reform, revealing the political, cultural and linguistic rationales underlying the arguments of complainants, linguists, language planners and judiciaries on both sides of the debate aisle. Furthermore, her piece attends to not only the ideologies tacitly imbedded within orthographies themselves but moreover within the metalinguistic reactionary discourses centered upon them. These works in tandem indicate that LPP efforts and the language-representational practices/mechanisms they devise are socially meaningful, operating as part of non-linguistic initiatives and developing against a broader historical and sociopolitical backdrop. They echo Fishman’s (1974) observation that, “Every one of the system-building or revising triumphs of language planning has been carefully cloaked in sentiment, has appealed to authenticity rationales, has claimed indigenousness” (23). They likewise support Cobarrubias’ (1983) assertion that LPP efforts are grounded in at least one of four language ideologies: assimilation, pluralism, vernacularization or internationalization.

Besides highlighting the ideological nature of language mediation, several texts have moreover elucidated how spelling conventions reflect larger social preoccupations, namely participating in politics of similarity/difference much like Krapp’s (1925) early research on eye dialect (cf. Jaffe et al. 2012). Sebba (1998, 2007), for example, identified ideologies of difference underpinning British Creole orthographic choices (cf. author’s additional publications). Likewise, Fenigen’s (1999) work on Barbadian spelling in print media elucidates the social meanings borne by spelling and the role that orthographic choices play in marginalizing and othering practices. What these works reveal not only mirrors the conclusions of the previously reviewed works, which hone in on the interest-laden aspects of devising an orthography through LPP, but furthermore echoes Woolard and Schieffelin’s (1994) explanation that “orthographic systems cannot be conceptualized simply as reducing speech to writing, but rather [...] are symbols that carry historical, cultural, and political meanings” (65).

Finally, other works in studies of language and society, while not considering LPP activities or graphization, *per se*, have similarly explored language-mediating or communicative technologies as sites of ideological production and negotiation: cf. the telephone

(Bauman 2010), radio (Spitulnik 1998), newspaper press (Blommaert and Vershueren 1998), literacy practices related to reading, writing and spelling (Collins 1996; Jaffe 1996; Schieffelin 2000), and even translational practices (Gal 2015). Among the works cited here and especially pertinent to our discussion is the recent trend of studies which take as their foci media texts and the ideological discussions housed therein (see collection of chapters in Blommaert 1999; Johnson and Ensslin 2007; Johnson and Milani 2010). Such pieces highlight the interdiscursivity and historicity of media discussions and their ideological content, which are ultimately synchronic snapshots and micro-level enactments of larger ideological processes (e.g., broader cultural systems of beliefs or cycles of ideological conventionalization/naturalization and contestation) (Blommaert 1999; Milani 2010). In the same vein as this scholarship, texts dedicated to discourses and contentions surrounding the *AOLP* have shown the reform and Portuguese orthography to be embedded within broader social processes and relations. To fully appreciate the sociolinguistic and sociopolitical context of this reform and why Lusophone debaters might support or take issue with a (near-)homogenous orthography, I will offer an overview of the scholarship on the *AOLP*.

2.1. *Spotlighting the 1990 orthographic agreement*

The *AOLP* has received considerable scholarly attention (Almeida, Santos, and Simões 2010; Fernandes et al. 2008; Miranda, Da Silva, and Medina 2005). While some texts treat the practical implications of the Agreement's new writing conventions (Carvalho et al. 2012; Ferreira, Lourinho, and Correia 2012), other works go beyond its immediate intricacies to consider social implications of the *AOLP* (Botelho 2009; Da Silva 2011; Da Silva et al. 2009; Da Silva Sobrinho 2009; Moreira, Smith, and Bocchese 2009; Santos 2010; Schmitz 1998). Among them, Garcez (1993) provides a sociohistorical background on Portuguese orthography, revealing an evolution in reform criteria among language codifiers: i.e., phonetic considerations (c.16th century), philological and pseudo-etymological criteria as part of Romantic Neoclassicism (c.19th century) and a phase of simplification preceding the 1911 reform. Garcez furthermore reveals that linguistic considerations, such as efficiency, rank lowly among *AOLP* priorities: "The case of corpus renovation discussed here is indicative of the extent to which language planning is a political and ideological practice rather than a purely linguistic enterprise" (24). Building upon Geerts, van den Broeck, and Verdoort (1977) framework, Garcez argues that Luso-Brazilians instead associate the *AOLP* with more than 11 other concerns, including anxieties about Brazilian cultural-linguistic spread (i.e., Rejection of the Brazilianization Argument; see Garcez 1993, for a detailed discussion).

Zúquete (2008) also surveys the history of Portuguese orthographic reforms, presenting arguments posed *pro et contra* the *AOLP*. Just as "linguistic ideologies are never just about language, but rather also concern such fundamental social notions as community, nation, and humanity" (Woolard 2004, 58), Zúquete demonstrates how *AOLP* responses surpass mere matters of language and writing, bearing moreover geopolitical and personal significances. For example, anti-Agreement arguments problematize the reform by linking it to questions of national identity and sovereignty, while still other opponents view the orthography as a patrimony or essence of its users. As such, resistance to the *AOLP* and to uniformization is construed as fostering diversity and cultural/political independence in the era of globalization.

By contrast, reform supporters often have transnational or global aims, according to Zúquete. Specifically, the *AOLP* has been appropriated as a geopolitical strategy for transnational projects among the international community of Portuguese speakers. In addition to goals of consolidating the language, many advocates aim for increasing the national dimension of Portuguese vis-à-vis the number of inhabitants of Lusophone countries. These projects hinge on the notion that orthographic unification will not only elevate the image of Portugal but will furthermore promote Portuguese as a global language while facilitating the reconceptualization of diverse Portuguese-speaking polities into a unified, transcontinental Lusophone space (i.e., *Lusofonia*, cf. Morier-Genoud and Cahen 2012), affording Portuguese speakers and potentially even Galicians greater economic and political capital in the globalizing world.

3. Framing the present orthographic reform debate

3.1. Theoretical framework and methods

Official discourses on the reform as well as the *AOLP* text itself establish that the present reform is bound with national and supranational politics and relations (prestige promotion, international language unification and phonetic fidelity) dating back to Portuguese exploration and continuing through the era of decolonization. Echoing this point, reform analysts pinpoint the linguistic, sociopolitical and historical implications and reverberations of the *AOLP*. Focusing on historicity and interdiscursivity, I apply a language ideological analysis (Johnson 2005; Milani 2010) to online debate rhetorics surrounding the *AOLP* to disentangle local discourses, their ideological underpinnings and their broader sociocultural significances. In particular, I employ a thematic discourse analysis and a micro-level framework for attending to the social meaning and function of language to tap into the paralinguistic ideas at play and the overarching sociocultural milieu signaled in local discourses on the reform.

The first concept in this framework is indexicality, which builds upon the idea of index (Peirce [1902] 1955). Silverstein (1976) elaborates several types of indexicalities; I will consider non-referential indices, which convey information about the communicative context (e.g., qualities of the language user) and, rather than contributing to the denotation of a word, signal social meanings.

Because reform debates are centered on opposing or promoting an agreement that aims to partially unify Portuguese orthographies and, by extension, Portuguese language varieties, they are connected to interested ideas of similarity and difference – initially, at the level of language and eventually at the social level. Irvine and Gal (2000) discuss three semiotic processes whereby language comes to define the social world and through which ideologies of differentiation work; collectively they allow us to understand the social meanings of the *AOLP*: iconization, fractal recursion and erasure. These processes naturalize and rationalize the original indexical linkages upon which they are grounded and permit debaters to see their ideas regarding the *AOLP* as commonsensical.

Iconization builds upon the Peircean concept of icon, signifying by means of resemblance, and is one semiotic process whereby language ideologies come to influence social life. Through iconization, indexical linkages between linguistic forms and the social world exist not simply because of association but moreover based on purportedly shared

attributes. Because of the perception of resemblance, the ideological linkage appears to be essential or natural. Fractal recursivity is the process through which distinctions that are meaningful at some level or domain of social life become repeatedly projected onto other levels or domains. The resemblance of categories at multiple levels reinforces and naturalizes the distinction. Irvine and Gal (2000) lastly offer the concept of erasure. Erasure works alongside other semiologic processes to foreground ideal attributes to the exclusion of phenomena, such as the oft-contradictory nature of arguments, that would otherwise problematize a language-ideological schema.

3.2. Data source

To investigate how orthography matters locally and the more global import, social values and historical meanings borne by the reform, I capture a language ideological debate (Blommaert 1999) about orthographic reform from a popular online blog portal for Portuguese users (citation omitted to protect confidentiality). The blog site is based in São Paulo, Brazil, and tends to concentrate on topics related to the Internet, despite the linguistic nature of the blog under discussion. The portal is among the most famous in Brazil and has been recognized as the most popular site for several years (International Data Group 2012). This data source was chosen under the assumption that, given its credentials of large circulation and readership, it will allow access to general native-speaker opinions circulating about language to capture the meanings attached to the orthographic reform.

The blog entry discusses the timeline of the *AOLP* and aspects of orthography that were changed in accordance with the Agreement. It is concerned with “converting” or transitioning Portuguese users to the new conventions and provides rules and examples contrasting pre- and post-Agreement norms. It is key that this online blog offers an overview of the *1990 Orthographic Agreement*, especially on a site renowned for its popularity and broad readership. For one, the blog becomes an authority on the *1990 Portuguese Orthographic Agreement* while raising the reform, which would otherwise be an academic issue, to popular consciousness for general access and contribution irrespective of participants’ academic training. It is an instance of the popular uptake of an authoritative pronouncement, i.e., one of “the historical moments during which the polity gets involved in making policy” (Blommaert 1999, 8), and suggests that these commentators take for granted that they, as Portuguese language users, perhaps organically have a say, a stake or even an expertise in the matter of Portuguese orthographic reform. Notably, the tutorial at the start of the blog offers just enough information on the reform so that all readers can then subsequently engage in the debate as informed parties or perhaps even as authorities on language reform. In fact, we see commentators referencing the blog entry as a sort of authority on the matter of the reform. We likewise find commentators drawing upon each other’s remarks for both critical and referential citation, thereby forming an ongoing conversation. Thus, we can say that while the Internet is at times more socially exclusive than other types of media which transcend social barriers (e.g., age, socioeconomic status, computer literacy, internet access), the medium of the World Wide Web also transcends barriers (e.g., academic or professional barriers and natural impediments like geography or airwaves) like no other language-mediating

technology and as such allows for greater accessibility and even integration of the populous-expert divide.

By creating the original blog post and utilizing an open comment section, this site created a new space for discussion and invited Lusophone speakers into the metalinguistic conversation about Portuguese orthography. The blog post received 66 reactionary posts between November 2008, and July 2010, and the present study considers the remarks of those Brazilian and Portuguese respondents. The debate captured on this site presents an opportunity to study not only semiotic processes and discourses of difference/likeness (enabled by iconicity, fractal recursion and erasure) but also their local enactments and ideologically loaded meanings (i.e., how the reform concerning Portuguese orthography is embedded within broader social processes and relations, such as culture, nation and citizenship) and thus precisely why people oppose or support the AOLP or LPP efforts, in general.

4. Ideologies of the 1990 orthographic reform debate

I have established that blog participants attach a greater meaning (beyond language planning) to the reform by drawing on interrelated semiologic processes (Irvine and Gal 2000) that justify their opposition or support of the AOLP. The logics that emerge in the blog comments have been consolidated into three predominant themes or, more specifically, insecurities about language and the orthographic reform:

- (1) Orthographic reform as a threat to writing and speech
- (2) Orthographic reform as a threat to notions of selfhood, peoplehood and political relations
- (3) Orthographic reform as a threat to cultural capital

To reiterate, these discourses and the online conversations embedding them, even while appearing idiosyncratic, are historical and interdiscursive. Below, I describe each and present excerpts from the blog to show how these logics, undergirded by social-semiotic processes, collectively work together to convey the ways in which writing systems matter. Moreover, since ideologies are historically grounded, I also show that these discourses can be linked to theoretical traditions in language studies and thus broader beliefs about language and society. I will start by unpacking the first logic regarding the AOLP.

4.1. Discourse 1 – orthographic reform as a threat to writing and speech

Discourse 1 entails different views on the relationship between spoken and written language and may take many forms. At times, it is phonocentric, that is, privileging phonologically-based orthographies and embedded within a structuralist theory of language – a linguistic-theoretical paradigm that has propelled a number of orthographic decisions in LPP (Johnson 2005; Sebba 1998), including the AOLP. In keeping with Saussurean principles, the structuralist approach to orthography reflects a view of language as an autonomous or self-contained system, separate from other aspects of language practice and other systems of meaning (Sebba 1998; Johnson 2005). Viewing

languages as floating in isolation in the world, it dismisses their social location. Furthermore, in prioritizing synchronic dimensions of language at a given point in time, this model also implies carrying out orthographic revision in ways that privilege synchronic factors above diachronic ones (e.g., etymology) (Sebba 1998). The structuralist approach to orthography is grounded in the idea of spoken language as prior to written language, according “a secondary function to writing whose task is then to re-represent objective, real-world meanings that have been previously encoded at the level of spoken language” (Johnson 2005, 139). This model also implies that phonologically-motivated (transparent) orthographies, with one-to-one mappings between phonemes and graphemes, are not only neutral and superior to other writing systems (e.g., opaque orthographies) but also more learnable and efficacious (Sebba 1998).

To be clear, the *AOLP* and official reform discourses follow a phonocentric logic. Similarly, the phonocentric version of Discourse 1 is exemplified in assertions about the need for writing to reflect speech, as in the remark by Commentator 24:

I'll only be happy when they get rid of the accents, the "S" having the sound of [es], the "X" having the sound of [eks], "Z! having the sound of [zi]. We will be rid of explanations of the Etruscan and cuneiform origins of the language. We need to say what is written and write what is said. What came out of Sanskrit, Greek or Latin, riddled with Ottoman, Moorish or barbarian insertions does not matter. [I'm] interested in talking, avoiding pretentious grammar correction.³

Per his remark, Commentator 24 advocates a transparent orthography with tight sound-letter correspondence, stating outright, “*We need to say what is written and write what is said.*” Moreover, his comment celebrates the hypothetical obsolescence of appealing to Portuguese’s “*origins*” when using the language. Making what is likely a mocking reference to several ancient languages, which, in his words, do “*not matter*,” he takes a stance against orthographies based on etymological principles. Yet, the paradox in this comment, perhaps, is that Commentator 24 is admittedly not completely satisfied by the current *Agreement*. The reform, like him, privileges phonetic principles over etymology, but apparently not enough to win over this Lusophone speaker.⁴ In the following comment, Commentator 51 begins by also expressing preference for a less etymological, more pronunciation-based orthography but changes his stance later on.

Truthfully, to me, as a Portuguese, I think this is chaos and completely pointless! And stupid. When the <ph> was dropped from <Pharmácia>, for example, and was replaced by <f>, I even see the relevance because it was unreasonable two letters to get the sound of one. Now this? They want to standardize any- and everything else? Who does this benefit? Just the publishers. Since the same book will be printed for all countries where the official language is Portuguese. I am completely against the orthographic agreement. It will remove the essence of who we are. The Portuguese language is beautiful for the difficulty it has. If you want to be futuristic and anticipate the future, then start writing with “x” like the “fuckers” of today! [sentences written in cyberspeak spelling] “Paxax por aki?” [are you coming by here?] – “Tax c kem?” [who are you with?] – it’d be “nicer.”⁵

Commentator 51 finds it “reasonable” to replace the <ph> in <pharmácia> “pharmacy” with <f> because of sound-symbol correspondence, i.e., the notion that there should be one grapheme for each phoneme. Such a spelling choice appeals to phonemic principles rather than etymology, i.e., the Greek origin of the word and its original orthographic representation with <φ> . Yet, this structuralist logic is short-lived and contradicts other

ideologies embedded in his remark, as Commentator 51 (counterintuitively) opposes the *AOLP*, a reform that supports the phonetic fidelity of the Portuguese orthography and thus accounts for phonological variation between Lusitanian and Brazilian Portuguese. For one, he expresses general annoyance with the extent of standardization and charges that the *AOLP* has a financial agenda to benefit publishers. There is further irony in the fact that, within a debate claiming that orthography matters, this participant disregards standard writing conventions to mock cyberspeak. Additionally, this blog participant associates orthographic changes from this reform with the spelling conventions of cyberspeakers and moreover affiliates the latter with notions of “futurism” or “the future,” albeit in a pejorative sense. Though on different sides of the debate aisle, his affiliation of simplification and phonocentrism with “anticipat[ing] the future” compares nicely to Commentator 24’s discussion of etymological orthographies vis-à-vis what are effectively ancient languages and a notion of antiquity. Another one of the more salient contradictions in his post is that he describes the reform as detrimental to the “essence” of Portuguese language users (cf. Discourse 2). Specifically, Commentator 51 anthropomorphically describes Portuguese as “beautiful” (cf. Commentator 46), asserting that it is the difficulty of the language that beautifies it, a concept which runs contrary to his previous structuralist concerns such as orthographic clarity through sound-symbol correspondence. This is where the semiotic property of erasure comes into play.

Commentators 51’s argument is self-contradicting. Namely, he on one hand expresses disapproval of some etymological spelling choices (e.g., <ph> to represent [f]). Yet, on the other, he opposes the *AOLP*, which privileges phonetic fidelity, because it would remove the “difficulty” and thus “beauty” and “essence” of Portuguese. Rather than his position being weakened by such contradictions, erasure neatly sweeps aside the incongruity of his opinion, allowing Commentator 51 to both support phonemic principles for some words and disparage the *AOLP* and its LPP goal of standardization (Nahir 1984); he can both find complex graphemes “unreasonable” and deride orthographies that facilitate literacy practices. Thus, while other social-semiotic processes imbue language with social meaning, erasure furthermore rationalizes these values and the positions of debaters.

Discourse 1 need not be phonocentric or structuralist, however; in some cases it sees writing and speech as unrelated (Commentator 39) or even opines an opposite directionality between orthography and pronunciation whereby writing shapes spoken language. Such is the case for Commentator 4 in this online language ideological debate, who, unlike some of the participants, does not find the current *Agreement* to privilege particular language users (i.e., *miguxos* or “cyberspeakers”). Rather, Commentator 4 explains,

‘I will only consider it to be the victory of cyberspeakers on the day when I’m obliged to write <voçe> [‘you’ spelled non-standardly] instead of <você> and when everyone else finds it normal for the infinitive not to have an <r> at the end. Then I can talk like an idiot!’⁶

In response to this, Commentator 39 argues yet another interpretation of speech-script relations:

Dear [Commentator 4], I read your comment, and I was determined to let you know or remind you that the New Agreement does not consider Phonetics, nor the Phonology of our language, because, obviously, this is Orthography. Therefore, “<voçe>” [‘you,’ spelled non-standardly] will not need to “talk” like an idiot (just write [like one]). Laugh! A big hug!⁷

Commentator 39, who displays unfamiliarity with the expressed goals of the *AOLP*, namely, its preference for phonemic principles, indicates that he sees orthographic and phonological matters as disconnected. This position on speech-script relations distinguishes Commentator 39 from the (wavering) structuralist phonocentrism of previous blog participants and the speech-reflects-writing philosophy of Commentator 4.

Like the actual *AOLP*, the hypothetical orthographic changes described by Commentator 4 are phonetically-motivated. He alludes to the fact that *<você>* could hypothetically be spelled with *<ç>*, given that *<ç>* consistently represents [s], whereas *<c>* represents multiple sounds. He also discusses the hypothetical abolition of word-final *<r>* in infinitives, which would render a more phonologically-motivated spelling, given that syllable-final /r/ is weakened (i.e., fricativized [χ h]) and/or omitted in many Brazilian Portuguese varieties. Yet, Commentator 4 finds that such hypothetical changes in a phonemic direction would privilege cyberspeakers and would prompt speaking “like an idiot.” This implication (that writing would influence speech) offers a different perspective on the relation or directionality between speech and orthography (cf. Haugen 1966) and runs contrary to phonocentric discourses. Moreover, in asserting that orthographic changes would be visited onto spoken language (i.e., “Then I can talk like an idiot!”), this comment relies on the semiotic property of recursion between levels of language (i.e., orthographic transparency or written simplicity becomes oral simplicity). I will return to this point later in the article. First, let us compare these perspectives on the relationship between spoken and written language with that of Commentator 46.

I want to say beforehand that I am Portuguese and do not agree with this ridiculous agreement [...] What bothers me the most in this agreement is the suppression of the letters *<P>* and *<C>* in words like *<OPTIMO>*, *<ACCAO>*, *<FACTO>*, etc. Also the disappearance of hyphens bothers me (I like hyphens). Not talking about the disappearance of *<H>*s (I do not know if this is included or not). I suppose for the Brazilians the disappearance of the dieresis is cumbersome too. I can never say, ‘Now that is a beautiful *<facto>*.’ Are we talking about a beautiful fact (a truth etc.) or a fine suit (apparel)? [although the pronunciation is the same, *<facto>* in Brazilian Portuguese means ‘fact,’ while in Portugal, *<facto>* is used to designate ‘suit’]

In my humble (not sure if this *<h>* [in ‘humilde’] would disappear, but if so ... NEVER for me) opinion, I think that it should be left as is, the Portuguese from Portugal has its beauty, the Portuguese from Brazil too, as much as the Portuguese from other Palop countries [Portuguese-speaking African countries].⁸

Commentator 46 opposes a number of the orthographic changes brought about by the Accord: the abolition of the dieresis, new hyphenation rules, suppression of silent consonants and so forth. Yet, it is worth noting that some of his concerns are unwarranted. For example, the suppression of silent consonants will not affect all words, e.g. *<facto>*, which will remain an optional spelling variant. Furthermore, Commentator 46 alludes to the confusion that would be caused by the suppression of consonants, which he suggests would result in multiple homophones: “I can never say, ‘Now that is a beautiful *<facto>*.’ Are we talking about a beautiful fact [...] or a fine suit?” Interestingly enough, however, such words were already homophonous, hence the term “silent consonants”: “one of the reformations proposed in the Accord is the suppression of some post-vocalic consonant letters spelled but not pronounced in Portugal” (Garcez 1993, 61). Even if unwarranted, Commentator 46’s concerns (about written language impacting speech) are certainly not

unheard of. And although they allude to the potentially detrimental impact that new spellings may exert on Portuguese pronunciation, they remind of other common anxieties that motivate reform opposition, such as resistance to change and a preference for tradition (cf. Discourse 3) or (national) individuality (cf. Discourse 2) more so than linguistic shortcomings of the Agreement itself. In other words, it is more so matters beyond language that underpin Commentator 46's anti-Accord position than (purely) linguistic issues themselves.

4.2. Discourse 2 – orthographic reform as a threat to notions of selfhood, peoplehood and political relations

Compared to logics that prioritize the transparency and learnability of orthography, this discourse does not privilege pragmatic concerns. Rather, it contends that language and orthography matter for selfhood, peoplehood and polity and for negotiations of identity between local, intermediate and international communities. By vivifying/humanizing and politicizing language practices like writing, LPP initiatives go from being impersonal matters to national and political concerns or even human rights issues.

Ways of talking about language and orthography that explicitly articulate them with notions of peoplehood or ownership can be traced to the Herderian philosophy of language. The romantic nationalism of German philosopher von Herder saw language as critically important to definitions of a people or nation, in fact, equitable to an ethnicity; it was "the natural hallmark, and the most precious possession of a people (Volk) or nation, reflecting its special spirit and identity" (Irvine 2006, 689).

Herder not only saw language as a patrimony but moreover as a natural essence of a people: "each language has its distinct national character [...] nature imposes upon us an obligation only to our mother tongue" (Herder 1992, cited in Bonfiglio 2010, 132). Herder, then, is one of the pioneers of linguistic organicism through his application of climate and ecology to language and nation: "language [was] to be viewed as a plant that transforms itself, like the god Proteus, in accordance with the 'soil' of the culture that feeds it" (131). Bonfiglio also traces organicism, conflations of language and social groupings, as well as biological, kinship, corporal and arboreal metaphors in language studies to the early modern period and ideologies of ethnolinguistic nationalism among emergent nation-states. Discourse 2, then, also reflects the long-established tradition in linguistics of biologizing languages through analogies between organic and linguistic phenomena – drawing comparisons, e.g., between the genetic code and language, biological and linguistic evolutionary processes, organism and language endangerment, organism death and language death (*glottophagy*), human genocide and linguistic genocide (*linguicide*), genetic or familial relations among humans and among languages, and so forth (cf. Calvet 1974; Crystal 2000; Day 1985; Mufwene 2001; Nettle and Romaine 2000; Robins and Uhlenbeck 1992; Rudnyc'kyj 1976; Sereno 1991; Shanon 1978; Thomason 2002; Thomason and Kaufman 1988; cf. Mufwene's additional publications). Since Discourse 2 essentializes language, presuming that people X speak language X and/or by mapping organic attributes onto languages, it follows that comments using this discourse will involve iconicity.

Organicist treatments of language and orthography are found in several comments in the debate over the AOLP. They appear in discourses about Portuguese as the "cultural mother" of Portuguese speakers (cf. Commentator 22), which maternalizes the language;

in discussions of language as a patrimony or belonging with an owner; and in other discussions of language as a living creature and embodiment of human attributes, as in the following remark by Commentator 58.

The only language that does not evolve is a dead language. As the Portuguese language is very alive, it is acceptable that it suffer changes in accordance with the times in which we are living.⁹

Commentator 58 rationalizes the orthographic reform by asserting that Portuguese is a living language and that living languages evolve, a statement which biologizes language to rationalize the activity of language reform. His choice of the word “sofrer” in describing the reform process, with its dual meanings of “undergo” and “suffer”, also vivifies the language and follows the tradition of organicism in language studies. Commentator 20, then further extends this language-biologizing rhetoric, essentializing connections between language, on one hand, and groupness and history, on the other. As such, the reform can be interpreted as an affront to individuality and heterogeneity.

I agree with [Commentator 58], language is a living thing. Those who give life are the people who use the language. It is I-M-P-O-S-S-I-B-L-E to unify the Portuguese language, just as American English and English from England are different ... bc [because] the cultures are not and will never be unified and the peoples are in diverse continents, with their historical influences ... our Portuguese has a little bit from the Indians, a little bit from Blacks, a little bit from each community that composes our population. There is no way to change the realities just to make everyone the same ... what an idea!!!¹⁰

To say the very least, Commentator 20, like Commentator 58, illustrates anthropomorphism in his treatment of language as a living organism, brought to life by language users. Yet, this logic goes further than a simple attribution of animacy to languages. Like Herder, Commentator 20 sees linguistic and ethno-racial boundaries as coinciding. He iconically associates languages with their national or historical contexts and the people who occupy those spaces. Since Portuguese is spoken throughout the world, it follows that the variability of the Portuguese language typifies the variability of its contexts of use. Specifically, through iconization, he presents Brazilian Portuguese as an embodiment of the qualities (human variation and diversity) of its environment. As such, the essentialized orthography comes to bear not only national and political significance but also racial and cultural implications, constituting a particularly effective contra-reform argument in a country renowned for championing its national ideology of *mestiçagem* (“racial and cultural mixture”) (Washington 2016). Commentator 20 furthermore indicates that American and British Englishes differ according to their contexts, and he uses this distinction among English varieties as an analogy for Portuguese. His recursive logic is that if the English language is divided by context, then so should Brazil and Portugal have distinct language varieties. By investing language and orthography with social meanings of multiculturalism and heterogeneity, any attempt to unify orthography can be construed as an attempt at cultural unification/homogenization, an effort to wipeout diversity.

What this interpretative schema overlooks through erasure, however, are the facts of migration and mobility, i.e., that African-, Indian- and European-descending speakers of Portuguese are not *in situ* but rather are dispersed throughout the Lusophone world. With that, all Portuguese varieties have “a little bit from each community that composes

[every] population." This statement also overlooks more recent immigrants to Brazil (e.g., Syrian Lebanese, Japanese). Lastly, Commentator 20 is recursively mapping national and racial boundaries onto the levels of language and, by extension, orthography. Again, this recursive logic can be marshaled against orthographic unification because, inasmuch as each language variety has an ideal community of users, so too should each community have its own orthography. This mapping, however, forgets that while Portuguese is the official language of nine countries alongside Macau, there have only been two orthographies since 1911. As such, the idea that orthography has ever represented the contexts of its use and an ideal set of speakers is problematic or simply inaccurate.

Because iconic articulations between peoplehood and language are recursively expanded to polities, Discourse 2 also involves the association of language practices with political and historical relations. Though the political significance of language originates in ancient practices of conquest, language and the nation as political concepts became entwined through the emergence of the modern nation-state, whereby a developed language became a defining and legitimizing feature of a developed polity (Haugen 1966; cf. Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). This imagining of the nation is infused with processes that fractally map political boundaries onto languages, assuming members of nation-state X to be speakers of language X (cf. Comments 20 and 46, above). Commentator 22, who projects political divisions onto peoples – in particular, colonial imaginings of Lusophone speakers – and then recursively replicates these mappings onto the realms of language and orthography, illustrates this logic:

In the nineteenth century, "brasileirês" [the Brazilian language] and [Lusitanian] Portuguese were the same, but the Portuguese government (then recently separated from Brazil and opposed to the empire, because Portugal had become Republican) decided to undertake an orthographic reform. Thus, Brazil continued with a more classic version of Portuguese than that of Portugal for many decades, a situation that later (already in the twentieth century) also "suffered" deep changes.

That is to say, since the artificial separation of political order, in which a people became artificially split in two [...] the "two" languages have been following somewhat different changes, but it is obvious that the identity is the very same. The Portuguese identity of the language about which many complain (because of ignorance of history) is actually proof that we are the same people, only artificially separated by politicians.¹¹

Like phonocentrism and Herderian romantic nationalism, which prioritize one-grapheme-one-phoneme and one-language-one-ethnicity, respectively, these imaginings of the nation-state favor minimal variation within the political unit and prefer that linguistic, ethnic and state boundaries coincide. Since nationalism encourages internal homogeneity/cohesion and external distinction, it follows that processes of erasure accompany imaginings of a language as the object of a state. As Haugen (1966) explains, the nation-state "minimizes internal differences and maximizes external ones. On the individual's personal and local identity it superimposes a national one by identifying his ego with that of all others within the nation and separating it from that of all others outside the nation" (68).

To be sure, official 19th century reform discourses have followed a geopolitical logic, treating orthographic divergence (1911) as a political schism between Portugal and Brazil

(cf. Garcez 1993) and the current standardization attempt as integral to a transcontinental political project. Specifically, the draft text of the Agreement iconically associates the disintegration of the Lusophone political entity and the emergence of independent Portuguese-speaking states with the possible disunity of the language. It recursively interprets divergence at political scales as detrimental to workings at the levels of language and orthography and thus counts on the reform to reunify and strengthen the Portuguese language and community.

By the same token, the following comment features a political argument undergirded by the triad of interrelated semiotic processes (Irvine and Gal 2000) to render the *AOLP* as modern-day colonialism, an affront to Brazilianness and an instance of Portugal's arrogance vis-à-vis a former colony:

Why should Portuguese be more like the one in Portugal? What advantage do we get from that? If it were just a matter of commerce, then it would only change the commercial sector, because I want nothing to do with the Portuguese [people]. It's already enough that they did that shit to our country . . . they exploited the colony a lot and lost everything to England, and today that little piece-of-crap country over there still thinks it's better than us.¹²

Comment 45 espouses a postcolonial (separatist) imagining of the global Lusophone community, in contrast to Commentator 22's discourse of (supranational) unity, and furthermore communicates a particular social memory of colonialism. Namely, this participant sees language as iconically embodying its speakers such that an attempt to unify orthographic norms analogously seeks to assimilate speakers. Following this logic and in light of the colonial relationship between Portugal and Brazil, the Agreement becomes an issue of political dominance for this Brazilian commentator and, like any national threat, is justifiably opposable. In other words, we notice a larger ideological contention between notions of assimilation and cultural imperialism versus national individuality within Commentator 45's post-colonial approach, and transnational political unity and integrity versus artificial political dissension within Commentator 22's understanding. What Commentator 45 misses, however, is the fact that the reform affects the orthographic conventions of both countries and furthermore implements more changes in the Lusitanian than the Brazilian norm. Commentator 51, who we heard from previously, also interprets the reform as a danger to her country.

I tell you, from the bottom of my heart, that it hurts me as a Portuguese. Increasingly we are from no country. The culture is becoming endangered in this "very" global world! We are all equal, and what really makes us different are cultural aspects. I presume that the Great Luís Vaz de Camões is currently turning over in his grave . . . It was an outburst of a Portuguese pleased with what he had. Thank you all for facilitating things for the lazy ones! 1 hug to all Portuguese who express themselves in the Portuguese language! Without regard to race, accent, party, color or social status!¹³

Commentator 51 construes the project of orthographic unification as a detriment to the political integrity of Portugal. Her interpretation likely derives from the nation-building formula outlined earlier (Haugen 1966). That is, since developed nations are to be internally homogeneous and transnationally distinct, linguistic unification across nation-state boundaries runs contrary to the principles of nation building. By the same logic, opposition to the reform comes to signify defense of country and patria. It is through erasure and the suppression of intra-national linguistic variation that Commentator 51

can imagine that Portugal was ever a common political community based on an exclusive, shared language.

Commentator 51 also conveys an emotional and historical attachment to the Lusitanian spelling norm, alluding to the 16th-century poet Camões, considered by some to be Portugal's greatest poet and by Garcez (1993) to have single-handedly promoted Portuguese to the status of a literary language. Commentator 51 implies that a unified orthography challenges the literary heritage and/or orthographic and cultural continuity of Portugal by exclaiming that Camões is "currently turning over in his grave" at the notion of the reform. This assertion associates the pre-Accord orthography with a nostalgic past and projects Camões as an iconic representation of the Portuguese language. The assertion, however, assumes that the Lusitanian orthography, like any patrimony, has been transmitted intact across almost five centuries and that only the 1990 reform is disrupting this historical continuity. It overlooks the long history of reforms that Portugal has endured since Camões' time (cf. Garcez 1993) and the fact that, if orthographic changes disturbed mortal slumber, then Camões could have never fallen asleep.

Lastly, I want to highlight how Commentator 51 iconically projects the simplicity (or facility) of the new writing system onto its purported users, rendering the simplification of the orthography's complexity as a shortcut to privilege indolence. This logic is much like one seen previously with Commentator 4 (under Discourse 1), for whom orthographic transparency potentially gave way to (cognitive) simplicity or talking "*like an idiot!*" Evident in remarks concerned with the import of the reform for people and nations (Discourse 2), then, are "(stereo)typifying" discourses (Milani 2010). Grounded in the semiotic property of iconization, these discourses attribute certain linguistic characteristics to ideal users (e.g., nonstandard and/or simplified spellings to cyberspeakers – Commentators 4 and 51) or assign language practices (e.g., orthographic norms) to certain communities of speakers (e.g., Brazilians, Lusitanians or Lusophones as a whole – Commentators 20, 45, 46, 51). Moreover, they imbue language with anthropomorphic attributes or values, e.g., construing orthographic complexity as beautiful (Commentators 46 and 51) or perhaps pretentious (Commentator 24) and, conversely, linguistic transparency or facility as "lazy" or "idiotic" (Commentators 4 and 51) in the construction of favorable and unfavorable speaker prototypes.

Also noteworthy is how these metadiscourses reinforce indexical associations between linguistic practices and certain points in time. For example, orthographic reform (e.g., transparent or phonocentric orthographic forms and cyberspeak, which are sometimes conflated in remarks here), is represented as the language of the present ("today") or even the "*future*" (Commentators 51 and 58). Conversely, older orthographic conventions are associated with notions of a nostalgic past (Commentator 51) or obsolete antiquity (Commentator 24). But what do ideological contentions between purported tradition and modernity, past and future have to do with securing the nation? It appears that comments concerned with the significance of the reform for people and nations (Discourse 2) rest on different assumptions about history and time – and, through a recursive logic, all aspects of human life and society including language. Thus, in Commentator 58's representation of Portuguese as "*very alive*" and, appropriately, subject to change "in accordance with the times in which we are living," we observe a dynamic, progressive and developmental conception of temporality (historicism) and, by extension,

a vision of “languages [and their nations] as mutable and perfectible over time, subject to cultivation and improvement through human intervention” (Woolard 2004, 66). According to Woolard, this historicized perspective of time began to take shape during the 16th century and Renaissance period and became conventionalized as dominant thought through 18th-century German Romanticism, thus going hand in hand with nationalist discourses. Given that it holds language change as development, we can understand why the reform of Portuguese orthography is favorable to this blog participant. This historicized logic also underpins the remarks of Commentator 20 but enables a different stance on the reform. Specifically, this participant sees each Portuguese national variety as necessarily organic and specific to its context and, as such, holds for Portuguese orthography what German historicism held for social entities: “Each historical entity and period could only be understood in its own terms and its own context. Institutions appropriate to one setting could not successfully be imposed on, much less predicted in, another” (59). That is, by this temporal logic, the *AOLP* is problematic because it attempts to uniformize distinct orthographies and languages irrespective of their disparate contexts and thus essential differences.

These historicized conceptualizations of time and language differ from, e.g., Commentator 51’s atemporal viewpoint. As previously stated, Commentator 51 implies that the Lusitanian orthography has essentially remained intact across almost five centuries, since the time of Camões, and that the 1990 reform would disrupt this historical continuity. His vision of a timeless, constant Lusitanian language and, by extension, his opposition to the *AOLP* are premised on different understandings of temporality (*messianic*) and language mutability, i.e., viewing stasis and continuity as natural and change as corruptive, sentiments commonly observed in discourses surrounding sacred and classic languages (cf. Eisenlohr 2006; Woolard 2004). Speaking on the greater significance of antiquity and constancy in discourses of language and nationhood, de la Cueva (1993, cited in Woolard 2004) explains, “The ancient has great kinship with the good, and it is a clear indication of being [good] to have antiquity … Gold is the best metal because it can become older than others that fire could damage and consume. Only gold could defend itself, becoming more pure” (68). Thus, it becomes clear why an attempt at planned language change (LPP), perceived as degenerative through the prism of the messianic-time vision, is strongly rejected by this speaker. Overlooking the multitude of actual political and linguistic changes that Portugal (and its language) have undergone in the last half millennium, through the messianic perspective, the perceived antiquity and constancy of the Lusitanian orthography authenticates, enriches and fortifies it and, through recursive semiotic processes, the Lusitanian language and nation as well.

4.3. Discourse 3 – orthographic reform as a threat to cultural capital

The final discourse offers that orthography matters as a skilled practice, authority or form of competence, “acquired as a result of repeated performances over time,” and is a lens whereby “any process of reform might be construed as a threat to the value of the previous standard as cultural capital” (Johnson 2005, 142). A familiarity with established norms leads people to adopt this model and to cling to the status quo of writing conventions. In comparison to structuralist and phonocentric principles of orthography (Discourse 1), then, advocates of Discourse 3 are often more concerned with issues of

personal convenience than with ideas of communicative and pedagogical effectiveness and learnability pertaining to younger or inexperienced language users (Johnson 2005; Sebba 1998). Similarly, just as Discourse 2 is concerned with the continuity of language as a cultural patrimony or essence, this third logic also sees the continuity of writing as a skilled practice as something worth protecting. Furthermore, Discourse 3 sees the *AOLP* for its personal repercussions, thereby iconizing the practice of writing and allowing a rendering of the *AOLP* as a personal affront rather than a purely linguistic concern, just as the second logic sees reforms to language as reverberating onto social structures like people and polities. Such concerns are also underpinned by the semiotic property of erasure, which foregrounds the inconvenience of learning a new orthography and overlooks the convenience and facility that orthographic standardization creates for Lusophone speakers as a whole, to legitimize opposition to the reform. It is as Commentator 14 writes:

I don't know if it's because we have a certain resistance to change [spelled nonstandardly, perhaps purposely], but I, in fact, do not approve of this orthographic agreement. It will be good for whoever understands a little bit of the language and does not know how to accentuate various words. It may be practical in that sense, but oh well. I don't approve.¹⁴

In other words, Commentator 14 recognizes the potential for the new orthography to facilitate literacy and as such to benefit more inexperienced language users but nevertheless opposes the Agreement based on how it will affect more seasoned language users.

The notion of orthographic competence (Discourse 3) emerges as a recurrent discourse in online responses, like the following by Commentator 13:

Complicated. These rules were already ingrained in my head. I can't even imagine writing <ideia> [idea] without an accent mark. Even Mozilla's spellchecker itself indicates an error!¹⁵

Here, Commentator 13 expresses a concern that tends to arise during the activity of orthographic reform, wherein orthography is seen as a competence or cultural capital. He speaks of the pre-1990 rules as a sort of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977), skills durably installed and deeply inculcated during early years of socialization – so much so that he cannot imagine using the new writing conventions, e.g., not graphically accenting <ideia> (or “idea”). He also alludes to the practical complications of implementing a new reform, in this case, updating software in accordance with new conventions. Similar frustrations emerge in the following remark by Commentator 30:

THIS ORTHOGRAPHIC REFORM IS STILL GOING TO GIVE ME A BIG HEADACHE!!!!!!¹⁶

Writing in all uppercase letters to indicate emphasis or yelling, Commentator 30 represents the *AOLP* as a source of discomfort. Most probably, she sees the introduction of a new orthography as undermining her familiarity with the pre-1990 conventions. Commentator 19 similarly raises this concern:

Well, there you have it. It's during these times that I begin to understand the phrase “when I think I know all the answers, someone comes along and changes the questions”

But I think this new agreement will be good, in the sense of being the tip of the iceberg for unification of the Portuguese language.¹⁷



Like Commentators 13 and 30, this blog participant alludes to the frustration of having to revise one's orthographic competence due to policy changes, like the Agreement. Yet, despite this concern, Commentator 19 lauds the benefits of the reform for the project of language unification and the promotion of Portuguese as a global language. Ultimately, then, political and linguistic logics have trumped his concerns with the issue of orthography as a skilled practice.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Through a thematic analysis of online debates of the *AOLP* that attends to language's non-referential functions and turns to emic theories and native-speaker perspectives of language as part of an acknowledgment of native-speaker linguistic awareness (Kroskrity 2000) and the need for reflexivity in LPP efforts (Johnson 2005), this research has identified three native-speaker linguistic-theoretical models underpinning arguments that support or oppose the 1990 orthographic reform. According to these models or logics, orthography matters because of its ideologically perceived impact on or threat to speech-writing relations (how it will shape language use), personhood and group (whether it preserves or harms the essence of a people) and, analogously, for nation and polity (whether it is beneficial or detrimental to national sovereignty/identity or transnational relationships), and lastly as a skill or competence in the linguistic market.

In tandem, these logics offer a coherent conversation about the significances of orthography and remind us that *AOLP* reactions cannot simply be reduced to insulated conversations about a language reform but should instead be viewed as intertextual, metadiscourses of culture, nation and citizenship anchored in wider ideological processes, social anxieties and concerns (e.g., globalization and (supranational) unity versus individualization and (national) autonomy, modernization versus tradition, the future versus the past) and a grander historical saga amongst Lusophone polities. These beliefs about linguistic practices operate through interrelated semiologic processes, which allow Portuguese and its orthography to not only signify referentially but moreover carry the outlined social meanings. Through iconization, characteristics of Portuguese and its orthography have become emblematic of its purported users and, in many cases, are essentialized. Through fractal recursion, iconic linkages between language practices and selfhood have been mapped onto the larger social collectivities of nations and polities, such that, just as a language is the essence of a person, so too is it the patrimony of a people, country or even an international community ideologically bound by a purportedly common tongue. The process of erasure is particularly important to the robustness of debaters' positions given that any one discourse may bolster a variety of stances on the issue of the *AOLP*. Thus, erasure, by eliding phenomena that would otherwise problematize a language-ideological schema, allows the many disparate stances within the blog to form a coherent thesis about the import of writing conventions. In tandem, these processes allow *AOLP* debaters to see the reform as consequential for writing conventions and literary matters but also as having broader implications for social life. They provide for the naturalization and rationalization of the original indexical linkages upon which they are grounded and permit debaters to see their beliefs about language as commonsensical. Together, the significances of orthography described in this

research have presented a framework for understanding how people think about and ideologize language and language planning efforts.

In corollary, orthographic debates and policies take for granted that spelling choices and writing systems matter. Both see orthography as important for language and scriptal practices as well as for social and paralinguistic reasons in an increasingly global world, like competencies or cultural capital, personhood and polity that have seeped into the realm of language. With that, it becomes crucial to emphasize the importance of grounding language policies within a socially-informed framework and local realities of language users. Likewise, it is critical that language planners recognize that any policy or activity, such as orthographic codification, aiming to alter language structures will also ultimately implicate social structures. As such, acceptance of the *AOLP* by the Lusophone community may require reconciling official considerations and priorities with popular concerns.

Notes

1. All excerpts were translated into English from Portuguese by the author and strive to maintain the character of the original texts. **My translation:** "The existence of two official Portuguese language orthographies, the Lusitanian and the Brazilian, has been widely regarded as prejudicial to the intercontinental unity of Portuguese and its prestige in the World;" "the draft text of the unified orthography of the Portuguese language [...] is an important step for the defense of the essential unity of the Portuguese language and its international prestige" (Novo Acordo 1990). **Original quotation:** "A existência de duas ortografias oficiais da língua portuguesa, a lusitana e a brasileira, tem sido considerada como largamente prejudicial para a unidade intercontinental do português e para o seu prestígio no Mundo;" "o projecto de texto de ortografia unificada de língua portuguesa [...] constitui um passo importante para a defesa da unidade essencial da língua portuguesa e para o seu prestígio internacional."
2. **My translation.** "With the emergence of five new Lusophone countries, the causes of disaggregation of the essential unity of the Portuguese language will be felt with more acuity and [will] also [be felt] in the realm of orthography. [...] It is therefore important to dedicate a version of orthographic unification that fixes and delimits the existing differences, and guards against the orthographic disaggregation of the Portuguese language" (Novo Acordo 1990). **Original quotation:** "Com a emergência de cinco novos países lusófonos, os factores de desagregação da unidade essencial da língua portuguesa far-se-ão sentir com mais acuidade e também no domínio ortográfico. [...] Importa, pois, consagrar uma versão de unificação ortográfica que fixe e delimite as diferenças actualmente existentes e previna contra a desagregação ortográfica da língua portuguesa."
3. **My translation.** "I'll only be happy when they get rid of the accents, the 'S' having the sound of [es], the 'X' having the sound of [eks], 'Z!' having the sound of [zi]. We will be rid of explanations of the Etruscan and cuneiform origins of the language. We need to say what is written and write what is said. What came out of Sanskrit, Greek or Latin, riddled with Ottoman, Moorish or barbarian insertions does not matter. [I'm] interested in talking, avoiding pretentious grammar correction." **Original quotation:** "Só vou ficar feliz quando acabarem-se os acentos, o 'S' ter som de esse, o 'X' ter som de xis ou chis, 'Z!' ter som de zê. Vamos estar independentes das explicações de origens etruscas e cuneiformes da língua. Precisamos falar o que se escreve e escrever o que se fala. O que veio do sanscrito, do grego ou latim, permeado de inserções otomanas, barbares ou mouras não interessa. Interessa falar evitando a pernóstica correção gramatical."
4. **My translation.** "[W]ith respect to content changes, from the principles upon which the Portuguese orthography rests, phonetic (or pronunciation) criterion is favored at some



expense of etymological criteria. It is the criterion of pronunciation that determines, in fact, the graphic suppression of silent or non-articulated consonants that have been preserved in the Lusitanian orthography essentially for reasons of etymological order. It is also the criterion of pronunciation that leads us to maintain a certain number of double spellings" (Novo Acordo 1990). **Original quotation:** "[N]o que respeita às alterações de conteúdo, de entre os princípios em que assenta a ortografia portuguesa se privilegiou o critério fonético (ou da pronúncia) com um certo detimento para o critério etimológico. É o critério da pronúncia que determina, aliás, a supressão gráfica das consoantes mudas ou não articuladas, que se têm conservado na ortografia lusitana essencialmente por razões de ordem etimológica. É também o critério da pronúncia que nos leva a manter um certo número de grafias duplas."

5. **My translation.** Truthfully, to me, as a Portuguese, I think this is chaos and completely pointless! And stupid. When the <ph> was dropped from <Pharmácia>, for example, and was replaced by <f>, I even see the relevance because it was unreasonable two letters to get the sound of one. Now this? They want to standardize any- and everything else? Who does this benefit? Just the publishers. Since the same book will be printed for all countries where the official language is Portuguese. I am completely against the orthographic agreement. It will remove the essence of who we are. The Portuguese language is beautiful for the difficulty it has. If you want to be futuristic and anticipate the future, then start writing with "x" like the "fuckers" of today! [sentences written in cyberspeak spelling] "Paxax por aki?" – "Tax c kem?" – it'd be "nicer." **Original quotation:** Sinceramente, para mim português, acho isto um caos e completamente despropositado! E estúpido. Quando caiu o PH de Pharmácia, por exemplo e foi substituído pelo F até vejo relevância pois era descabido duas letras para obter o som de uma. Agora isto? Querem uniformizar tudo e mais alguma coisa? Quem ganha com isto? As editoras, somente. Pois o mesmo livro serve para todos os países onde a língua oficial é a Portuguesa. Sou completamente contra o acordo ortográfico. É remover a essência daquilo que somos. A língua portuguesa é bonita pela própria dificuldade que ela tem. Se querem ser futuristas e antecipar o futuro então começem a escrever com "x" como os "putos" dagora! "Paxax por aki?" – "Tax c kem?" – era mais "giro".
6. **My translation.** "I will only consider it to be the victory of cyberspeakers on the day when I'm obliged to write <voçẽ> ['you' spelled non-standardly] instead of <você> and when everyone else finds it normal for the infinitive not to have an <r> at the end. Then I can talk like an idiot!" **Original quotation:** Só considerarei a vitória dos miguxos no dia em que eu for obrigado a escrever você ao invés de você e todo mundo achar normal infinitivo não ter r no final. Aí eu poderei falar igual idiota!"
7. **My translation.** "Dear [Commentator 4], I read your comment, and I was determined to let you know or remind you that the New Agreement does not consider Phonetics, nor the Phonology of our language, because, obviously, this is Orthography. Therefore, '<voçẽ>' ['you,' spelled nonstandardly] will not need to 'talk' like an idiot (just write [like one]). Laugh! A big hug!" **Original quotation:** Caro [Commentator 4], li seu comentário e me vi fadado a te avisar ou lembrar de que o Novo Acordo Ortográfico não contempla a Fonética, nem mesmo a Fonologia de nossa língua, pois, obviamente, trata-se de Ortografia. Portanto, "voçẽ" não precisará "falar" igual idiota (só escrever). Risos! Um forte abraço!"
8. **My translation.** "I want to say beforehand that I am Portuguese and do not agree with this ridiculous agreement [...] What bothers me the most in this agreement is the suppression of the letters <P> and <C> in words like <OPTIMO>, <ACCAO>, <FACTO>, etc. Also the disappearance of hyphens bothers me (I like hyphens). Not talking about the disappearance of <H> s (I do not know if this is included or not). I suppose for the Brazilians the disappearance of the dieresis is cumbersome too. I can never say, "Now that is a beautiful <facto>." Are we talking about a beautiful fact (a truth etc.) or a fine suit (apparel)? In my humble (not sure if this <h> [in "humilde"] would disappear, but if so ... NEVER for me) opinion, I think that it should be left as is, the Portuguese from Portugal has its beauty, the Portuguese from Brazil too, as much as the Portuguese from other Palop countries [Portuguese-speaking African countries]." **Original quotation:** Quero dizer antes que sou

portugues e nao concordo com este acordo ridiculo [...] O que mais me incomoda deste acordo e a extincao das letras P e C em palavras como OPTIMO, ACCAO, FACTO, etc. Tambem o desaparecimento de hifens incomodam-me (eu gosto de hifens). Nao falando do desaparecimento de Hs (nao sei se esta aqui ou nao). Suponho que para os brasileiros desaparecimento de trema seja incomodo tambem. Eu nunca poderei dizer "Ora ai esta um belo fato". Estamos a falar de um belo facto (uma verdade, etc) ou um belo fato (roupa)?Na minha humilde (nao sei se este H desaparecia, mas se sim ... NUNCA pra mim) opiniao acho que devia estar como esta, o portugues de Portugal tem a sua beleza, o portuges do Brasil tambem, tal como o portugues dos outros paises Palop.

9. **My translation.** "The only language that does not evolve is a dead language. As the Portuguese language is very alive, it is acceptable that it suffer changes in accordance with the times in which we are living." **Original quotation:** A única língua que não evolui, é a língua morta. Como a língua portuguesa está vivíssima é aceitável que ela sofra mutações de acordo com o tempo em que vivemos.
10. **My translation.** "I agree with [Commentator 58], language is a living thing. Those who give life are the people who use the language. It is I-M-P-O-S-S-I-B-L-E to unify the Portuguese language, just as American English and English from England are different ... bc [because] the cultures are not and will never be unified and the peoples are in diverse continents, with their historical influences ... our Portuguese has a little bit from the Indians, a little bit from Blacks, a little bit from each community that composes our population. There is no way to change the realities just to make everyone the same ... what an idea!!!" **Original quotation:** Concordo com o [Commentator 58], a língua é algo vivo. Quem dá a vida são as pessoas que utilizam o idioma. É I-M-P-O-S-S-I-B-L-E unificar o idioma português, como tb o inglês americano e da inglaterra são diferentes ... pq as culturas não estão e nunca serão unificadas e os povos estão em continentes diversos, com suas influências históricas ... nosso português tem um pouquinho de índios, um pouquinho de negros, um pouquinho de cada povo q compõe nossa população. Não dá pra mudar as realidades só pra ficar todo mundo igual ... que idéia!!! – quer dizer: que ideia
11. **My translation.** "In the nineteenth century, "brasileirês" [the Brazilian language] and [Lusitanian] Portuguese were the same, but the Portuguese government (then recently separated from Brazil and opposed to the empire, because Portugal had become Republican) decided to undertake an orthographic reform. Thus, Brazil continued with a more classic version of Portuguese than that of Portugal for many decades, a situation that later (already in the twentieth century) also "suffered" deep changes. That is to say, since the artificial separation of political order, in which a people became artificially split in two [...] the "two" languages have been following somewhat different changes, but it is obvious that the identity is the very same. The Portuguese identity of the language about which many complain (because of ignorance of history) is actually proof that we are the same people, only artificially separated by politicians." **Original quotation:** No século XIX o "brasileirês" e o português eram iguais, mas o governo português (recém- separado do Brasil e oposto ao império, porque Portugal passara a ser republicano) decidiu empreender uma reforma ortográfica. Desta forma, o Brasil prosseguiu com um português mais clássico do que o de Portugal durante longas décadas, situação que mais tarde (já em pleno século XX) também "sofreu" alterações profundas.
12. **My translation.** "Why should Portuguese be more like the one in Portugal? What advantage do we get from that? If it were just a matter of commerce, then it would only change the commercial sector, because I want nothing to do with the Portuguese [people]. It's already enough the shit they did to our country ... they exploited the colony a lot and lost everything

to England, and today that little piece-of-crap country over there still thinks it's better than us." **Original quotation:** Pra quê ter o português mais parecido que o de Portugal? Que vantagem a gente leva nisso? Se for só por questão comercial, que mude apenas para o setor comercial então, que com os portugueses não quero ter nada a ver. Já basta a k-gada [cagada] que fizeram com o nosso país ... exploraram a colônia a rodo e perderam tudo pra Inglaterra, e hoje são esse paisinho porqueira aí, que ainda esnoba a gente.

13. **My translation.** "I tell you, from the bottom of my heart, that it hurts me as a Portuguese. Increasingly we are from no country. The culture is becoming endangered in this 'very' global world! We are all equal, and what really makes us different are cultural aspects. I presume that the Great Luís Vaz de Camões is currently turning over in his grave ... It was an outburst of a Portuguese pleased with what he had. Thank you all for facilitating things for the lazy ones! 1 hug to all Portuguese who express themselves in the Portuguese language! Without regard to race, accent, party, color or social status!" **Original quotation:** Digo-vos, do fundo do coração, que isto me magoa enquanto Português. Cada vez mais somos de País nenhum. A cultura está a ficar ameaçada neste mundo "tão" global!

Somos todos iguais e o que realmente nos torna diferentes são aspectos culturais. Imagino que o Grande Luís Vaz de Camões esteja neste momento às voltas na campa ... Foi um desabafo de um Português contente com o que tinha. Obrigado a todos por facilitarem as coisas aos preguiçosos!

1abraço a todos os Portugueses a todos os que se expressam na língua Portuguesa! Sem olhar a raça, sotaque, partido, cor ou status social!.

14. **My translation.** "I don't know if it's because we have a certain resistance to change [spelled nonstandardly, perhaps purposely], but I, in fact, do not approve of this orthographic agreement. It will be good for whoever understands a little bit of the language and does not know how to accentuate various words. It may be practical in that sense, but, oh well. I don't approve." **Original quotation:** Não sei se é porque temos uma certa resistência a mudanças, mas eu, de fato, não aprovei esse acordo ortográfico. Vai ser bom pra quem comprehende pouco a língua e não sabe acentuar várias palavras. Pode ser prático nesse sentido, mas, enfim. Não aprovei.

15. **My translation.** "Complicated. These rules were already ingrained in my head. I can't even imagine writing <ideia> [idea] without an accent mark. Even Mozilla's spellchecker itself indicates an error!" **Original quotation:** Complicado, essas regras já estavam formatadas na minha cabeça, nem consigo me imaginar escrevendo "ideia" sem acento. O próprio corretor do Mozilla indica erro!.

16. **My translation.** "THIS ORTHOGRAPHIC REFORM IS STILL GOING TO GIVE ME A BIG HEADACHE!!!!!!" **Original quotation:** ESSA REFORMA ORTOGRÁFICA AINDA VAI ME DAR MUITA DOR DE CABEÇA!!!!!!!.

17. **My translation.** "Well, there you have it. It's during these times that I begin to understand the phrase "when I think I know all the answers, someone comes along and changes the questions." But I think this new agreement will be good, in the sense of being the tip of the iceberg for unification of the Portuguese language." **Original quotation:** Pois eh, é nessas horas que eu começo a entender essa frase "quando eu acho que tenho todas as respostas, vem alguém e muda as perguntas." Mas, eu acho que será bom esse novo acordo, no sentido de ser a ponta do iceberg para a unificação da língua portuguesa.

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