We address how differently situated social actors position themselves and others relative to figures of personhood (Agha 2006) associated with Portuguese migrants in France. Specifically, we explore how France-based YouTube comedic performers Ro et Cut enact stylized figures of first-generation Portuguese migrant, Antonio’s family in one of their most controversial and popular videos, Vamos a Portugal. The video depicts Antonio’s family’s preparation for their annual summer return trip to the Portuguese “homeland.” We analyze how commenters respond to the enactment and reflexively position selves and others relative to “first generation” figures.

There are multiple perspectives, or scales (Blommaert 2007, 2010; Wortham 2012) relative to which performers and commenters can interpret these Portuguese migrant figures, situated both within and beyond a given national society: from a French national perspective, where Antonio is an immigrant; from a Portuguese national perspective, where Antonio is an emigrant. Although much scholarship on language and migration has examined the fate of linguistic minorities from the perspective of the host-society, we go beyond a France-based analysis, to consider divergent interpretations of the video from a more transnational perspective, that is, to commenters positioned as nonmigrant Portuguese in Portugal. To these viewers, Ro et Cut may evoke tensions over attributions of authenticity and (non)modernity, connected to contemporary ambivalence in Portugal about emigration and Portugal’s international status. With our attention to comments that address Antonio’s relationship to the Portuguese homeland, we apply a polycentric approach to the study of language and migration.

Keywords: Migration, Portugal, YouTube.