Mobilizing linguistic marginality: Humour, youth and azoreanness in Toronto’s Portuguese market.

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Diasporic communities are useful spaces to explore the intersectionalities of nationalism, identity, language, and mobility across time and space, within the global and the local. This paper problematizes the multiple positionings of social actors and language varieties within the Portuguese community in Toronto, Canada. Despite being constructed as a homogenous ethnolinguistic and (trans)nationalist entity, my research suggests it is a market divided between European Mainland and Azorean Portuguese. Both groups represent different diasporas, with different migration patterns, and different linguistic and cultural capital. Although Azorean descendants represent two-thirds of Toronto’s Portuguese-Canadian market, their sociolinguistic habitus is stigmatized by a marked variety of (Azorean) Portuguese and centuries of socio-economic marginalization which positions Mainlanders as more powerful speakers and actors. Most second and third generation Portuguese-Canadians are marginalized by traditional discourses of portugueseness because their different cultural identities and languages (English, ”broken Portuguese,” bilingual Portuguese-English code-switching) are considered threats to the dominant Portuguese market which reproduces monolingualism and monoculturalism. Yet, at the margins of this dominant market there is room to challenge old hegemonic ideologies.

Based on qualitative, ethnographic fieldwork in Toronto, this paper examines two examples of how performances of azoreanness are gaining legitimacy in alternate spaces. First, an Azorean cultural association, which has not historically been a place of power within the local market, is receiving considerable resources from the Azorean regional government as it capitalizes on the globalized new economy to mobilize its diaspora as a springboard to post-nationalism, separately from the centralized Portuguese state. Second, the emergence of young Azorean-Canadian comedians on YouTube performing mocking sociolinguistic caricatures explicitly recognizes and resists naturalized ideologies of language and identity. These performances, legitimized by the actors’ in-group status, reveal how marginalized sociolinguistic capital can be (re)appropriated and (re)positioned.

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