

Sound-symbolic lexicalized words and the emergency of novel iconic spoken signals in Brazilian Portuguese

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Recently, there has been a considerable increase in the research of iconicity in linguistics and cognitive sciences, showing that this characteristic is also a fundamental part of our ability, as human beings, not only to communicate, but also to create, develop and use language (Ameka 2001, Perniss *et al.* 2010, Akita 2011, Flaksman 2017, Dingemanse 2019, among others). In the spoken modality, iconicity can be perceived in iconic sound-symbolic words already lexicalized, such as in onomatopoeias, ideophones, but it can also be expressed in novel signals (*cf.* Winter *et al.* 2023), *e.g.*, vocalizations and newly created words, not yet conventionalized, during interactions. Thus, the aim of this presentation, related to an on-going doctoral project, is to investigate not only some of the already lexicalized Brazilian Portuguese (BP) sound-symbolic words, but also how novel iconic signals emerge in spontaneous conversations in this language. For this, this study uses a video-recorded corpus of naturally occurring talk, previously recorded by *Museu da Pessoa*, and further selected and transcribed using ELAN. Despite some previous assumptions suggesting the absence of sound symbolic words in BP, this might not be the case. The example below illustrates the emergence of a novel iconic signal being used spontaneously:

- (1) *Quando fui lá, ‘blef’, caí lá dentro do buraco*
when go-PAST.1SG there SIG fall-PST.1SG there into of-DET.M.SG hole-M.SG
‘When I went there, ‘blef’, I fell into the hole’

This data (1) was produced in a context where the speaker tells a story of her childhood when she tried to climb a tree but the branch was too thin to bear her weight, leading her to fall into a hole right below the tree. As we can see, this novel iconic signal (SIG), ‘blef’, is being used by the speaker to provide a performative and depictive rendering of the scene, capturing the exact moment of the fall in a vivid manner. In this sense, she is not only describing the event (using the lexicalized verb ‘to fall’), but also inviting the listener to imagine how it would have been to be there, just like other sound symbolic words, or ideophones, do in other languages. Therefore, in a broader perspective, this research shall contribute to the field providing more and innovative data to the iconicity studies.

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