

arts and humanities

Code-switching no Face é um must: the use English borrowings when chatting on social media

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Abstract

English has long been recognised as the *lingua franca* of international communication and has been often related to areas such as business, commerce and academia. Recently however, young people have also used English extensively in their native discourse to help them create a sense of identity and group belonging. This poster aims to look at some of the English words and expressions used in the online chats of university students at the University of Aveiro and how they experiment, manipulate and apply the English they know when they communicate with each other in Portuguese. The data gathered clearly shows not only the extensive use of English, but also how widespread the use of expletives are, in both Portuguese and English.

Although language is not restricted to humans, we as a species are the only ones to use language with the ability to think and reflect upon past, present and future actions, which sets us apart from all the other species. For humans, language is in its very essence organic, and we have the power to manipulate, play with, experiment, alter, doctor and adapt language to suit our needs as active members of a community.

As the world becomes more globalised, English has become the juncture where cultures and identities come together and where ideas can be shared across and within communities. This means that English borrowings may be used in local cultures, sometimes imbued with local meaning, in order for people to express themselves. Young people are no exception, and seem to be setting the trend for this linguistic change, both in their oral discourse and in the way they communicate on social media. Franceschini (1998) points out that code-switching is *not 'supplementary, additional, peripheral behaviour or as an exceptional possibility, but rather ... a general characteristic of language i.e. variability in use, and an extra-linguistic factor, i.e. flexibility in behaviour'*. Jenkins (2003) goes on to add that *'it is the monolingual mindset which is unable to grasp the fact that a language does not have to be a mother tongue in order to be capable of expressing aspects of a speaker's social identity'*. Therefore, looking at how young people use English in their native discourse may help to identify ways in which they create their identities through language use.

Crystal (2008) states that this cross-linguistic language shift occurs through young people texting on mobile phones and that they *'pepper their messages with 'cool' English expressions'*. The same can be said for the way young people communicate on social media, and this research shows how English is used on Messenger to imbue university students' discourse with meaning.

For this study, students were asked to provide print screens of some of their chats on Messenger to see in an authentic context what English words and expressions they used. Figure 1 shows a student asking other members of a group whether or not they can be used and Figure 2 shows three print screens of a total of 24 print screens which the group provided.

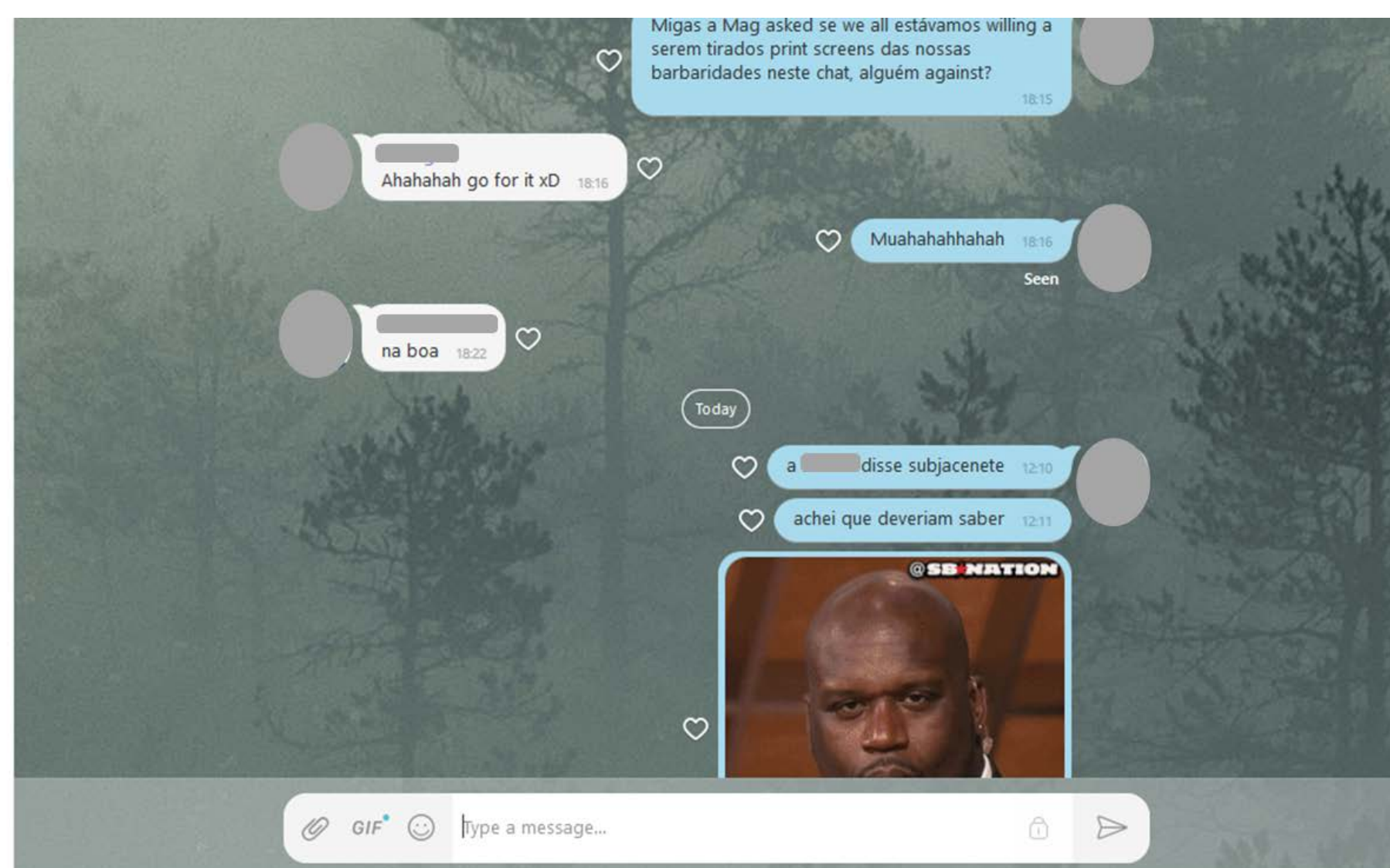


Fig 1 Conversation asking for print screens of messages to be used

As can be seen from Figure 1, my name (Maggie) has been reduced to 'Mag' and in the Portuguese dialogue, the following English words and expressions were used, some of which are actually part of the Portuguese sentence: 'print screens', 'against', 'go for it' and 'se we all estávamos willing'. Out of a total of thirty five words, excluding features like interjections, nine were in English and many were interspersed with Portuguese.

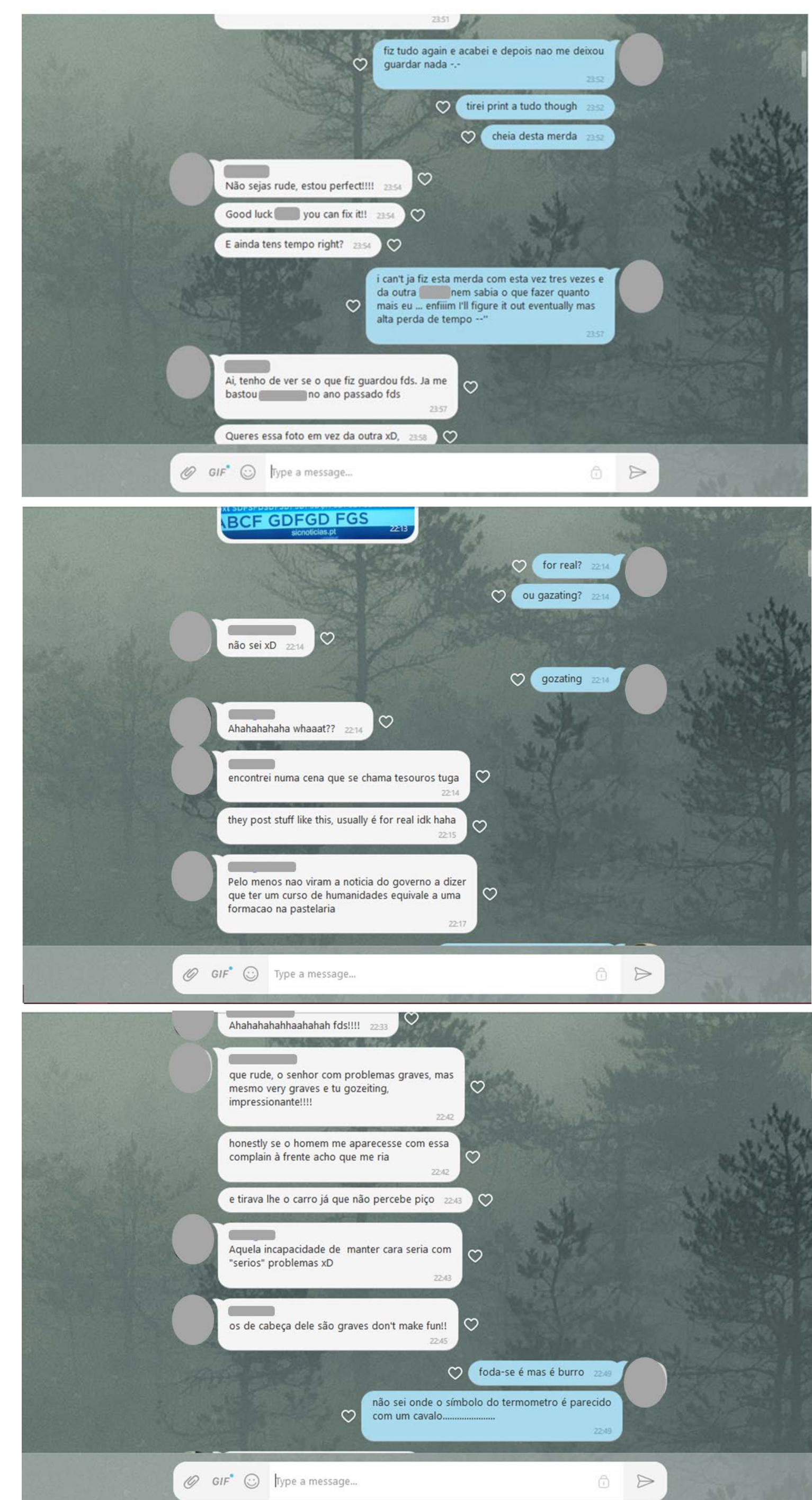


Fig 2 Print screens of other chat conversations

From Figure 2, the ubiquitous nature of the use of English is evident and there seem to be three clear uses of it in the Portuguese dialogue. Firstly, there are isolated words and expressions such as 'rude', 'whaaat', 'perfect', 'for real' and 'you can fix it' as well as acronyms such as idk (I don't know). Then there are other examples of language where English words are built into Portuguese sentences, such as 'tens tempo right' and 'honestly se o homem me aparecesse com essa complain à frente'. Finally, there are Portuguese words to which English sounding terminations have been added, such as 'gonzating' (from the verb 'gozar' to mean 'make fun of'), which is later written by another group member as 'gozeiting'. The following sentence shows instances of how these processes are applied: 'mas mesmo very graves e tu gozeiting'. Another feature of these chats is the excessive use of expletives, both in English and in Portuguese and which add a lot of piquancy to the discourse. In fact, of all 24 print screens, all of them had one of the abovementioned uses of English, as well as a lot of swearing, in both English and Portuguese.

Conclusion

This work shows that English is used extensively by young people when they chat on social media through the use of words and expressions but also through manipulating and playing with the language to create new forms of words in Portuguese, perhaps as a means to forge their identity and sense of belonging to a particular group.

References

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