

LUSOPHONY AND IDENTITY: SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF BRAZILIAN AND PORTUGUESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract:

In times of globalization, internationalization of education has become an essential tool in promoting the exchange of knowledge and practices, but also cultural exchanges between students, teachers, and institutions. This research has the main objective of contributing for the study of interculturalism in the context of Lusophony (1), by understanding the reciprocal identity and representational aspects (3), involving Brazilian and Portuguese students from the Universities of Aveiro, Coimbra, and Minho. In order to achieve that, we resort to the individual survey method followed by focus group, applied to a sample of Portuguese and Brazilian students. Our research is qualitative and exploratory.

Main text:

The preliminary research data shows that the Brazilian students from the Universities of Aveiro, Coimbra and Minho, reveal, mostly, to have experienced negative situations, including discriminatory occurrences in their academic careers. On the other hand, Portuguese students from the same institutions recognize that Brazilian students sometimes experience cultural difficulties (e.g. to keep their values and customs) in academia (see Table 1 / Survey - Closed Question).

Our survey included an open question, asking the subjects to find three to five adjectives to classify the Portuguese (for Brazilian subjects) and the Brazilian (for Portuguese students). In fact, most Brazilian students defined the Portuguese with negative connotation adjectives; characteristics with positive connotations came in second and last came those considered both positive and negative (see Graph 1 / Survey - open question). This means that, in general, Brazilian students from the Universities of Aveiro, Coimbra, and Minho represent the Portuguese with traits considered negative. The characteristics

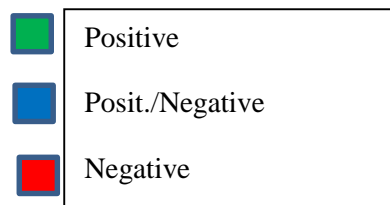
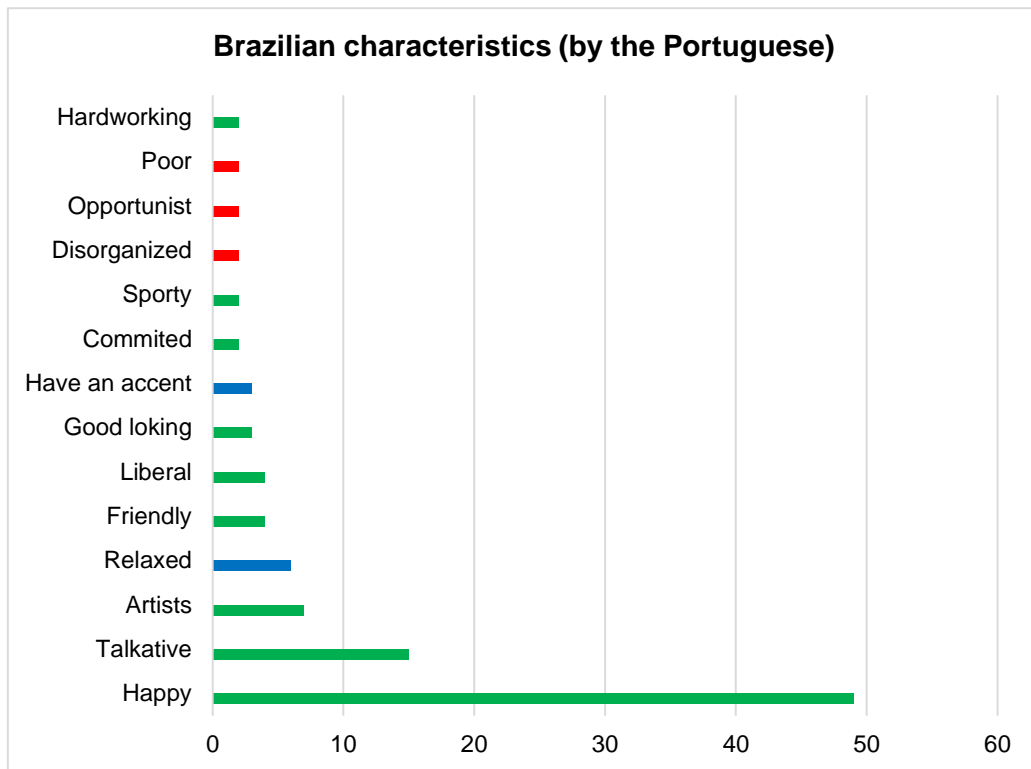
attributed to Brazilians by the Portuguese subjects mostly present positive connotations, followed by the characteristics considered both positive and negative, and finally, negative characteristics (see Graph 2 / Survey - open question).

At the focus groups meetings of we conducted with 64 subjects participating in this study, a trend emerged: systematically, Brazilian students tended to have more negative positions on the Portuguese than the Portuguese students about Brazilians. The pattern of responses of the Portuguese is quite different from the Brazilians, thus verifying the existence of some mismatches in the reciprocal representation of both groups (see Table 2 / Focus group).

Table 1
Individual survey – closed question

Brazilian students of the Universities of Aveiro, Coimbra and Minho				
Have you ever experienced an episode or situation of prejudice or discrimination in the form of looks, unkind words or reprehensible behavior in academia?				Total
Yes	No	A few times	Never thought about it	Respondents
15	11	7	0	33
Portuguese students of the Universities of Aveiro, Coimbra and Minho				
Do you think Brazilian students experience cultural difficulties (to keep their values and customs) in their relations with peers, friends, and teachers in academia?				Total
Yes	No	A few times	Never thought about it	Respondents
5	5	15	6	31

Graph 1
Survey – open question



Graph 2
Survey – open question

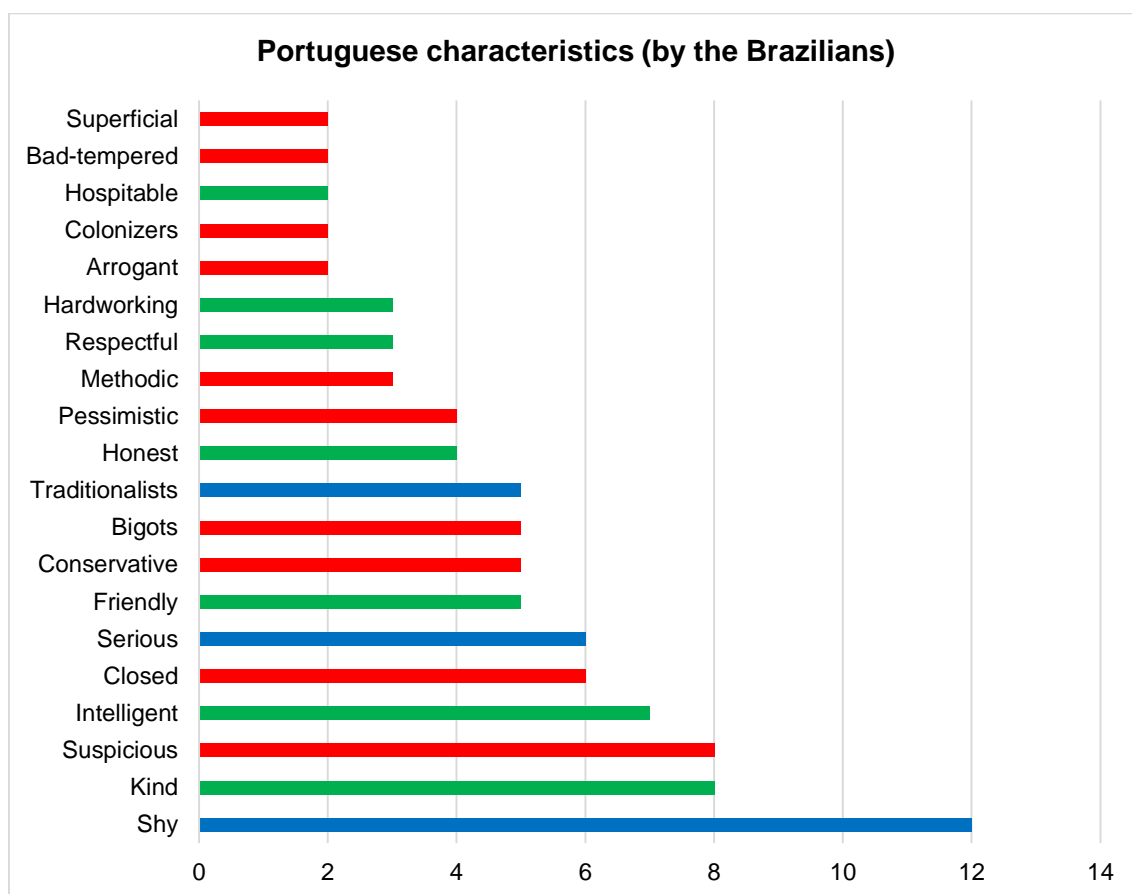


Table 2
Focus Group

Direction of subjects' positions Nacionality	Mostly negative positions	Mostly positive positions	Both negative and positive positions	Total
Portuguese students (about the Brazilians)	3	24	4	31
Brazilian students (about the Portuguese)	15	10	8	33
Total	18	34	12	64

Focus Group with Brazilian and Portuguese students of the Universities of Aveiro,
Coimbra, and Minho

Conclusion:

By relating the preliminary data of our wider ongoing investigation, as part of a doctoral thesis in Cultural Studies, we note that while the Portuguese students we studied recognize the difficulties and negative situations experienced by Brazilian students in Portuguese academia, they associate fellow Brazilians with characteristics with mostly positive connotations. Thus, despite Portuguese students' awareness of situations of prejudice against Brazilians, they do not attribute this situation to their personal attitudes. Similarly, in the focus group meetings, attended both by Brazilian and Portuguese students, we realized that mutual representations are configured through a mirror image effect. This asymmetry between the two positions can demonstrate a certain fissure in regard to mutual images within Lusophony (2), contrary to the assumptions of the idea concerning the absence of prejudice and difficulties in the relations between these subjects, particularly in academia.

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