

## **DISCOURSE OF RITUAL POSSESSION IN A BRAZILIAN *UMBANDA* TEMPLE**

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### **Setting the scene**

This article analyses a religious phenomenon that has increasingly become a widespread practice among Brazilians, whose daily necessities and events lead them to appeal for spiritual support in some *umbanda* temples. *Umbanda* is a religious ritual whose philosophic basis is derived from some African cults such as Yoruba, Bantu, Angola, and others, mixed with Catholicism and Spiritualism (Prandi, 1996; Silva, 1994, 1995, 2000). Prandi (1996), a Brazilian anthropologist, points out that *umbanda* is considered a religion that was born in Brazil and received significant influence of Catholicism and Spiritualism. This religious phenomenon, according to Prandi (1996), created space to syncretism, or the combination of different forms of belief and their practices, more precisely mediumistic practices. So *Umbanda* holds a specific ritual, with typical possession characteristics, that is, its members claim that they are controlled by spirits who have already died and have come back to offer fatherly advice to those who need spiritual help. During *umbanda* ceremonies, mediums are possessed by the spirits of Brazilian aboriginals or ex-African slaves and lose their own personality and start to represent the spirits' personality traits. In a word, *umbanda's* doctrine establishes that mediums in trance are to express the standpoints

and behaviour of the spirits who possess them (Birman, 1985). This paper, thus, investigates the conversational style of a *babalorisha*<sup>2</sup> possessed by a spirit, named *preto-velho* (male old-black), in interaction with four members of the religious ceremony: his wife and also the *ialorisha* (the mother of *umbanda* entities), the temple's president (woman) and vice-president (man), and an ordinary participant (woman).

According to Tannen (2000: 462), conversational style “refers to all the ways speakers encode meaning in language and convey how they intend their talk to be understood.” So this study presents some underlying discursive features of power common to the *babalorisha*'s conversational style, which suggests that his discourse seems to mirror other interests than those that underpin love and promote understanding towards his followers, as issue by *umbanda*'s edicts. For the sake of clarity, it is important to understand that the *babalorisha* cannot express any kind of imposition or powerful influence over his listeners, since it is totally contrary to the edicts issue by *umbanda*'s doctrine and principally because he is possessed by a male old-black spirit (ex-African slave who lived in Brazil while the country was a colony) who is considered a very kind and humble spirit. Regarding that a medium is to represent the spirit's personality traits and behaviour, and not her/his own behaviour, the *babalorisha* is expected to behave gently and kindly as well, like the male old-black who controls him in trance. However, on a number of occasions the *babalorisha* used to adopt a different, or “deviant”, discursive behaviour which is sometimes considered a stark fault line within the possession process.

It is worth saying that it was not possible for me to observe several other ceremonies from different *umbanda* temples, given that *umbanda* has some sacred rituals which are not easily accessible to strangers. In other words, this religion does not allow researchers to participate in several rites from other temples, since the researcher is expected to honour a kind of “religious contract” with the temple s/he is observing. In order to be accepted in the ceremony, I had to become what *umbanda*'s followers call *ogã*, that is, a kind of “gatekeeper” or the responsible for running the sacred ceremony. Consequently, I adopted Interactional Sociolinguistics theoretical ground to consider the ceremony with an expert

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<sup>2</sup> The *babalorisha* is the principal medium of *umbanda* ceremonies. He is responsible for the solemn ceremony and for invoking the spirits to possess the mediums. This is the reason why he is considered the father of *umbanda* saints, that is, the spirits who are praised.

eye in line with *participant observation*, an ethnographic technique that was of central importance to my investigation. Interactional Sociolinguistics is a branch of Discourse Analysis that has connections with some approaches to spoken interaction, mainly Conversation Analysis and Ethnographic techniques (Cameron, 2001: 106-22). Bearing this in mind, I drew on *participant observation* to analyse the way the *babalorisha* presented his arguments to his listeners throughout talk-in-interaction (Richardson, 1991). This methodological approach offered me ways to fully participate in the ritual observed for more than five years, in order for me to learn enough experience to interpret the data collected (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In Goffman's words (1989: 125),

[b]y participant observation, I mean a technique that wouldn't be the only technique a study would employ, it wouldn't be a technique that would be useful for any study, but it's a technique that you *can* feature in some studies. It's one of getting data, it seems to me, by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation, or whatever. (Emphasis in original)

In view of this, *fieldwork* is a work of observation, by means of insertion into the community observed, involvement in public issues of that community, and learning from those who share particular interests within the group or speech community analysed (cf. Duranti, 1997; Maanen, 1988; Willis and Trodman, 2000). In this study, much of the interpretation given to the data collected during my fieldwork activities is due in part to my own experience as a participant observer as well as the jottings I wrote down while I observed my informants and their social or religious practices.

This paper bases its fundamental key concepts, along with ethnographic methods, on Goffman's theoretical ground, whose ideas posit that we represent *ourselves* through interaction in a bid to keep control of the social situation in which we are engaged and claiming for social territories (Goffman, 1967, 1971, 1978, 1979; Lemert and Branaman, 1997). Likewise, Gumperz's studies (1982, 1992), especially the notion of *contextualization cues*, serve as a basis to the various systematic analyses demonstrated in this study. Not surprisingly, these two theoreticians are the most influential theoretical axis that has inspired several studies within Discourse Analysis tradition, principally *politeness*

(Brown and Levinson, 1978, 2000) and *ritual discourse* (Szuchewycz, 1994). I now briefly examine these theories, followed by the methodology used for this study, the data analysis, commentaries, and final remarks.

## **Theoretical background**

Taking into account the organizational features of conversation developed by Sacks et al. (1974), in this study I focus my attention on the sequential organization of some strips of talk considered the locus in which a series of conversational exchanges come together in a unique set. During conversational sequences speakers manage their turns in face-to-face interaction, through self- or other talk selection, which leaves space for interactional negotiations that handle the conversation they are participating in. Moreover, when conversation is interpreted as a sequence of turns in which speakers co-construct their social reality, we can view discourse as the major locus that co-ordinate social actions as well as speakers' viewpoints and behaviour (Cameron, 2001: 87-105). While making use of turn-taking, speakers are more likely to impose their ideas and standpoints upon others, defending their arguments and showing their *selves* up more clearly (Goffman, 1981). Utterances, therefore, are not housed in paragraphs but in the ability speakers have in dominating and selecting their turns at talk (Goffman, 1978). So when taking part in face-to-face interaction speakers endorse the typical characteristics of that interaction to cope with the reality they share with other speakers.

Admittedly, context plays an important role in the activities and tasks common to talk-in-interaction micro-field, since "human beings (...) dynamically reshape the context that provides organization for their actions within the interaction itself" (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992: 5). In fact, context is the arena where speakers set their *footings* (Goffman, 1979) or the alignments or projected self speakers manage to make clear their participation, in order to win their listeners approval for the assertion of their opinions and to the construction of meaning. For Goffman (1979), *footing* is commonly linked to oral language, mainly prosodic segments, code switching, volume, pitch, stress, rhythm and tonal quality. As he points out, "footing is very commonly language-linked; if not that, then

at least one can claim that the paralinguistic markers of language will figure. Sociolinguists, therefore, can be looked to for help in the study of footing, including the most subtle examples” (1979: 5). Based on this scenario, then, contexts are settings or *frames* (Goffman, 1974) that express the organization of experience each speaker-in-interaction holds and through which participants interpret and understand utterances while engaged in conversation. In view of this, *footings* and *frames* are jointly negotiated during interaction, not merely in terms of who is talking to whom, but mainly in terms of the way speakers’ social relations are handled, kept and improved.

Accordingly, each participant shows her/his *face*, or “the image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes” (Goffman, 1967: 5), seeking respect, understanding and consideration while interactants employ efforts to contribute to the development of social relations. As a result, if *face* claims for respect and consideration, it is true that *politeness* strategies are certainly a major requisite to enhance participants’ social relationships, given that “face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (Brown and Levinson, 2000: 322). Brown and Levinson (1978, 2000) claim that speakers have two kinds of *face*, namely, *positive face*, or the consistency of self-image and the desire that this self-image be respected and approved, and *negative face*, or the claim for personal preserves and freedom both from imposition and of action. Furthermore, speakers’ negative and positive faces can be threatened in contact with others when a sort of *face-threatening act* (FTA) is performed. To avoid this, individuals adopt a series of mitigation strategies, like the use of indirectness to soften their attitudes towards others, the use of apologies, nominalisations, hedges, and so forth. During the data analysis, I shall demonstrate a few examples of how directness, or baldly on record, is adopted to maintain the status quo of the *babalorisha*’s opinions which, as a result, express dissatisfaction among interlocutors.

Gumperz (1982) also posits that any talk is a social activity which involves: (i) *moves*, or the paradigmatic adjacency pair structure of talk used to create knowledge and share turns; (ii) *conversational involvement*, or the social exchange speakers naturally rely on in order to either assert their intentions using verbal and non-verbal discursive performances or seek meaningful and natural conversational patterns; and (iii) *presupposition*, or the abilities speakers have to infer the real aims of conversation, to build

up knowledge and gain experience. The foregoing sheds light on what Gumperz (1982) names *contextualization cues*, that is, the linguistic and paralinguistic features, such as certain lexical and phonological strings, as well as similar other linguistic units, that actually highlight how speakers and listeners make clear their discursive intentions according to their cultural background.

So far I have presented an overview of the theoretical basis I use for the analysis shown in this study. In addition, I borrow from Szuchewycz (1994) the three commonest thematic aspects that are more often pronounced in religious discourse, namely, *unity*, *thematic coherence*, and *shared focus*. ‘Unity’ is concerned with discursive sequential themes, linked by particular subjects that affect the ritual performance. ‘Thematic coherence’, in turn, treats discourse as a coherent corpus that is likely to be able to offer religious followers enough meaning to the construction of their social and ritual experience. In the end, ‘shared focus’ yields social meanings to the followers as they agreeably share experience and beliefs with each other while institutionally recognised religious discourses are being held. So this paper points out that

the creation of religious experience/meaning really is *work*: it involves the deliberate linguistic effort of individuals who exhibit different degrees of competence. It is crucially *social work*: cooperation, attention, negotiation, and support are essential, as in conventional interaction, if the desired communicative ends are to be achieved ... (Szuchewycz, 1994: 391, emphases in original)

Interestingly, still, is the fact that in this study co-operation and negotiation seem to be, on the whole, interactive strategies used to support firstly the *babalorisha’s* communicative aims on the one hand, and the communicative ends of the sacred ceremony itself on the other.

### **Some comments on methodology**

The idea that belongs in the realm of the method used for this study is the following:

... the aspects of interaction that interest interactional sociolinguists are often ones that the participants in talk have little or no conscious awareness of. They

could not explicitly explain how they recognize a certain intonation pattern as signalling important new information, or why one minimal response (a brief acknowledgement of another speaker such as *mhm*, *yeah*, *right*) sounds encouraging, while another sounds dismissive. They may also be unaware that these aspects of interactional behaviour are *variable*, with different meanings for different groups of language users. (Cameron, 2001: 107, emphases in original)

Bearing this in mind, this study posits that discourse is co-constructed from both a series of natural and spontaneous conversational involvements and a great deal of shared and tacit cultural knowledge, as well as linguistic structures. So the data consists of more than twenty hours of the *babalorisha's* natural talk in interaction with his wife (*ialorisha*), who is considered the highest figure within the religious hierarchy after the *babalorisha*, the president (woman) and vice-president (man) of the religious temple, and an ordinary participant (woman). The corpus was carefully tape-recorded and the *babalorisha* was never aware of the exact moment his speech would be taped, in order to avoid any source of embarrassment, although he had allowed me to collect the data at any time it could be possible. This kind of spontaneous talk helped me to avoid what Labov (1972) labelled *the observer's paradox*, that is, how researchers may observe their informants without influencing their natural linguistic production. Therefore, when the *babalorisha* felt the influence of the spirit who possessed him and started his speech<sup>3</sup>, I used to discreetly tape his discourse since I was sitting beside him.

In addition, transcription methods used here are built on Conversation Analysis methods. In fact, naturally occurring conversation offers reliable data for the observation of how discourse is constructed by, shared with, and negotiated, and how speakers either announce or disguise their intentions in utterances, seeking to achieve a higher interactional involvement (Tannen, 2000). In these circumstances, the data was transcribed in accordance with the objective this research pursues, based upon what Ochs (2000) points out. In her words:

... one of the important features of a transcript is that it should not have too much information. A transcript that is too detailed is difficult to follow and assess. A more useful transcript is a more selective one. Selectivity, then, is to be encouraged (p. 168).

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<sup>3</sup> According to *umbanda's* doctrine, the *babalorisha* is considered a “speaking medium” or a person whose voice serves as a tool for the spirit to communicate with those who are still alive (Silva, 1994, 1995).

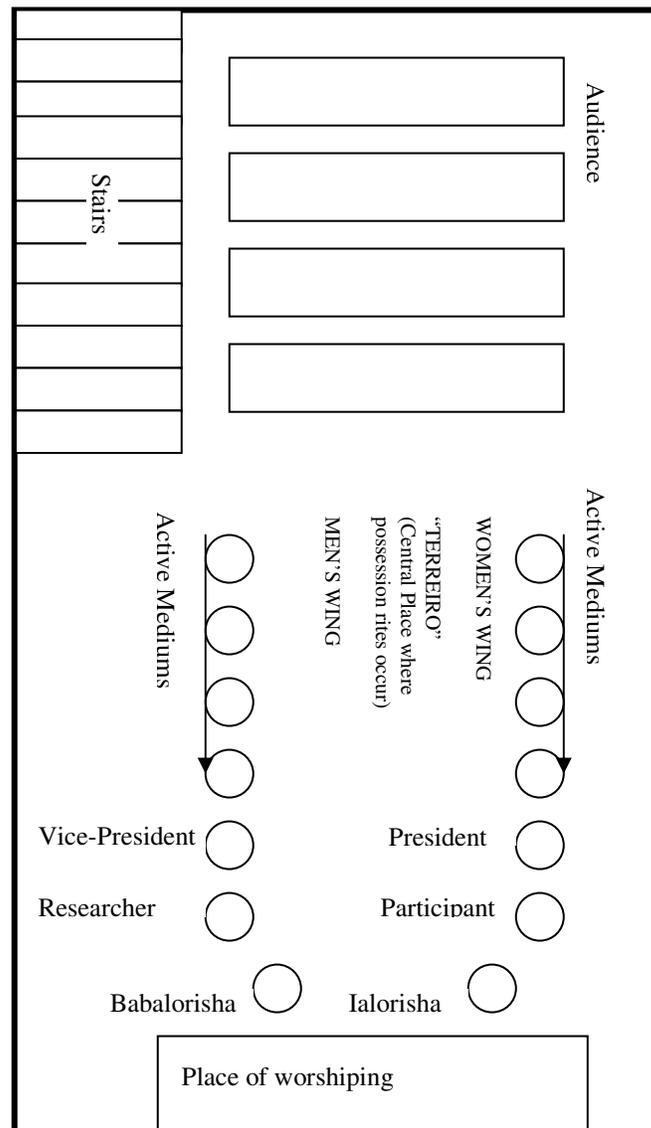
Admittedly, the transcription method I used in this paper selects the most important strips of talk in order to draw attention to some discursive features employed by the *babalorisha* and his interlocutors.

Finally, this study follows what Cameron and associates (Cameron et al., 1992) name *ethics*, *advocacy* and *empowerment*. An ethical research seeks to minimise any kind of damage to the researched by means of respect and consideration for her/his cultural beliefs and in-group relations. Moreover, more than respecting the researched, *advocacy* claims that researchers are asked to work *for* researched people by using their expertise to defend the informants' interests. In the end, in an *empowering* research, social researchers work *with* their informants in order to gain experience and to be accepted as an in-group fellow. In this study, all these three research steps were taken into account, that is, the wishes of the informants were respected, the results of the research were discussed with them, and the informants, or the recognised local experts, acted as advisers, systematic supporters and teachers whenever any doubt arose or whenever I was to cause any kind of religious or ceremonial fault. However, in this paper only some strips of talk are analysed, mainly those where we find interesting conversational strategies common to the *babalorisha's* talk throughout his interaction with the other participants under investigation. Consequently, this paper leaves aside more detailed interpretation of how ethics, advocacy and empowerment were pursued in this study, albeit these concepts lie behind the analysis done in this paper. In what follows, I present only part of the results obtained in a more systematic, qualitative and in-depth study (Rodrigues Júnior, 2002).

### **The data analysis and its results**

The data come from a meeting held at the temple investigated and whose members gathered together to clarify some points about spiritual growth and selfless acts of charity. The temple is located in a residential area of town and most of its members are drawn from local communities which have developed strong ties with the temple. During the ceremony, members are normally displayed in circle, sitting side by side in a small place called *terreiro*, that is, the place where fetishism (worship of or belief in magical fetishes) is

practised and where the major syncretic entities or guides named *orishas* are praised, in a totally different way from Catholicism or Protestantism ceremonial meetings. The *terreiro* is shown in figure 1 below:



**Figure 1:** Terreiro and place of worshipping

This spatial distribution allows openly talk, regarding that each member is able to see each one's face, gestures, as well as hear each one's voice. The *babalorisha* sits at a specific place where everybody can easily see, observe, talk and listen to him. The

*ialorisha* (woman), the president (woman) and the ordinary participant (woman) sit in front of the *babalorisha*, whereas the vice-president (man) and I (man) sit beside the *babalorisha*.

After the opening ceremony, the *babalorisha* in possession runs the ritual and delivers his speech. His wife, the *ialorisha*, introduces the theme that is going to be discussed (*Avatar Hierarchy*)<sup>4</sup>.

(1)

1 Ialorisha: well, it's the avatar [hierarchy /.../  
 2 Babalorisha: [well then well then I SAID (+) several avatar  
 3 names that have come to earth, didn't I" (++) so you all know what  
 4 avatar is (++) then the avatar's hierarchy (+) eh (3.6) how can I  
 5 say" let me tell you for you understand

(Ialorisha: bom é hierarquia [dos avatars /.../  
 Babalorisha: [pois é pois é EU falei (+) diversos nomes (+) de  
 avatares que receberam aqui na Terra (+) não é" (++) então vós  
 todos já sabem que que é avatar (++) agora eh hierarquia do avatar  
 (+) é (3.6) como que fala" deixa eu expressá pra vóises  
 compreendê)

The *babalorisha* appropriates the theme introduced by the *ialorisha* by means of overlapping, as seen in line 2. This conversational strategy shows that the *babalorisha* somehow or other includes his wife into his speech, as a way of guaranteeing his argumentative credibility, although he overlaps her baldly on record and, then, shows disrespect for her negative face. By contrast, instantiations of uncertainty and doubt during the *babalorisha*'s speech arise, as seen in the use of a tag question in line 3, as a request for confirmation of his explanation, and the presence of hesitation markers in lines 4 (*eh*) and 5 (*how can I say*"), which suggests that the *babalorisha* is trying to avoid losing his grip.

In the following excerpt (2), it seems that the *babalorisha* is not able to clearly express his opinions about the real meaning of *avatar* and its representation here on earth, which, in fact, puzzles his listeners. To clarify these points, the *ialorisha* uses historical facts to reinforce his argument.

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<sup>4</sup> *Avatar* is the incarnation of a Hindu deity, especially Vishnu, in human or animal form; an archetype. The translation of the excerpts from Portuguese into English is of my responsibility. The transcription conventions are the following: [ = simultaneous speech; CAPITAL LETTER = emphatic stress and higher pitch; (+) (++) (1.2) = pauses in seconds, which (+) stands for 0.5 second and (++) stands for 1.0 second; (?) = inaudible words; / = abrupt end of talk; /.../ = interruption; " = rising intonation, as of a grammatical question; ' = only

(2)

1 Babalorisha: HE is (+) he's ruling your world but his planet is RAGA  
2 Ialorisha: no (+)  
3 what it is all about is that the theory that Jesus isn't the earth's  
4 mentor anymore  
5 Babalorisha: yeah  
6 Ialorisha: now it is André (++) eh all this if you research  
7 on India's religious part eh  
8 Babalorisha: scientific part  
9 Ialorisha: India's scientific history  
10 there have been millions of years of ours  
11 Babalorisha: they have already said  
12 that André would come  
13 Ialorisha: they've already said eh they talk about this  
14 since  
15 Babalorisha: thousand of years  
16 Ialorisha: the Japanese talks about this  
17 Babalorisha: yeah  
18 Ialorisha: the  
19 Indians talk about this  
20 Babalorisha: well then  
21 Ialorisha: now /.../  
22 Babalorisha: now you've just known  
23 haven't you"

(Babalorisha: ELE está (+) ele está monitorando o vosso mundo mas o plano  
dele é RAGA  
Ialorisha: não (+) acontece que essa teoria que Jesus já não é  
mais o mentor da DAQUI DA TERRA né"  
Babalorisha: é  
Ialorisha: agora é o  
André (++) eh isso tudo se vocês pesquisarem a a parte eh (++)  
vamo falá religião eh a parte  
Babalorisha: científica  
Ialorisha: científica da Índia que  
tem MI-LHÕES de anos nossos mesmos  
Babalorisha: eles já falaram que viria  
o André  
Ialorisha: eles já falaram eh já falam nisso há  
Babalorisha: milhares de anos  
Ialorisha: os  
japoneses falam  
Babalorisha: é  
Ialorisha: os indianos falam  
Babalorisha: pois é  
Ialorisha: agora /.../  
Babalorisha: agora vós  
ficô sabendo né" (++) já sabem")

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rising intonation; (( )) notes and commentaries of the analyst; word = underlined words indicate theme shift or highlighted aspects; ::: = prolonged vowel.

In line 1, the *babalorisha* assures that *André*, an *avatar*, is ruling our world, as noted by the subject pronoun *HE* indicating both cataphoric reference to *André* in line 6 and anaphoric reference to previous information within the conversation<sup>5</sup>. In an attempt to cooperate fully with the interaction, the *ialorisha* overlaps her husband and self-select the turn of talk to unpack the idea that was presented in the flow of conversation (line 2). The *babalorisha*, however, allows her to talk in order to appropriate her discourse and set out his arguments. It is clear in lines 5, 8, 11, 12, 15 and 17 that the *babalorisha* is being supportive and carefully attentive to the *ialorisha's* standpoints probably in a bid to acquire self-confidence. At the end, as a means of preparing an imminent closing, the *babalorisha* says *well then* (line 20), following the pre-closing sequence that takes place in any naturally occurring conversation (cf. Levinson, 1983). However, the *ialorisha* ignores this conversational device and continues her talk. Promptly, thus, the *babalorisha* baldly overlaps her (lines 21 and 22), taking the turn of talk back to him. This conversational style, then, seems to denote his powerful discursive intentions.

Given the *ialorisha's* initiative, the *babalorisha* tries to expand his thematic discourse upon historical information, using for this purpose some history figures from Brazil, namely the Brazilian aboriginals (Amerindians) and their lifestyles. Nevertheless, this kind of argumentation seemed to be invalid, since he was not capable to connect themes, i. e. *avatars* and aboriginals, as seen throughout the excerpt below.

(3)

1	Babalorisha:	no (++) 'cause he was much stronger wasn't he" that's what
2		he had
3	Vice-President:	more [developed muscles only
4	Babalorisha:	[that was the power eh (+) what he had was more
5		power so he used to run the others
6	Vice-President:	he had more developed muscles/
7	Babalorisha:	that's it isn't it" he had more eh (++) he was more muscled like
8		this wasn't he" (+) <u>well</u> (2.0) this isn't for the avatar
	(Babalorisha:	não (++) porque ele tinha mais força (++) não é" era o que
		ele tinha
	Vice-President:	mais [evoluído nos músculos apenas
	Babalorisha:	[era o poder é (+) é ele tinha era mais força então ele
		mandava nos outros
	Vice-President:	ele era mais evoluído nos músculos
	Babalorisha:	pois é né" ele

<sup>5</sup> For anaphora and cataphora, see Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: chapter 9).

era mais (+) eh (++) musculoso assim' né" (++) muito bem (2.0) isso num é coisa do avatar)

When the *babalorisha* affirms that Brazilian aboriginals had only physical force and not intellectual one (lines 1 and 2), the vice-president takes the turn and says that the aboriginals only had well developed muscles, whose idea carries no connotation of power (lines 3 and 6). At this moment, the *babalorisha*, in order to avoid losing his face, overlaps the vice-president and re-affirms that the aboriginals were stronger and powerful (lines 4 and 5), consolidating their effective control over the weaker aboriginals. So the *babalorisha* avoids more extended discussions and discreetly escapes from using the discourse marker *well* (line 8) to preface a new interactional move and continue his thematic points (cf. Schiffrin, 1987). In view of this, the *babalorisha* does not seem to accept criticisms, which leads us to suppose that discursive hallmarks of control are associated with his conversational style.

The following excerpt continues the last one. I separated them to show that the *babalorisha* and the spirit who controls him in trance use the same subject pronoun *we* (line 1) to represent them. It suggests that they have similar opinions and standpoints which formulate the puzzling question – *who is really speaking: the babalorisha, the spirit, or both?*

(4)

1 Babalorisha: avatar (+) and they were changing (+) till we are (+) eh  
2 you are aren't you" (++) are in this situation (++) a house's  
3 chief, aren't you" a house's head (++)

(Babalorisha: avatar (+) e foram mudando (+) até que nóises estamos (+) eh  
vóises né" (++) estão aqui naquele (++) um chefe numa casa não é"  
numa casa (++) )

Brief though it is, this excerpt, however, shows how the *babalorisha*, in order to save his own face (lines 1 and 2), assumes a kind of 'binary identity', which he efforts himself to disguise. By using self-correction strategies (Sacks et al., 1977), the *babalorisha* avoided losing his performance face, but he left the impression that the discourse performed was both his (*we are*) and the spirit's who possesses him in trance, albeit the *babalorisha* improves efforts "to provide a correct portrayal of the god that has entered him" and to

allow “participants in the cult to believe that possession is a real thing (...)” (Goffman, 1959: 74).

Similar discursive practices are seen in the following excerpt. The *babalorisha* advocates that the best way to have sex is through love, kindness, and touch, like the *avatars* make. This condition is called, according to him, ‘felicity condition’. However, there was something odd about his argumentation, due to the fact that he talks looking constantly at the *ialorisha*, his wife, as if he really wanted to clarify, or explain, some points that belonged to them (lines 4, 6, 8, and 9).

(5)

1 Babalorisha: sometimes one feels pleasure and the other doesn't so arguments  
 2 arise ((changing the tape)) and he'll be happy (2.1) when he  
 3 makes love (1.8) 'cause here on this planet you still have love  
 4 affairs (3.9) you understand" ((looking at his wife)) (++) so  
 5 what happens (++) HE (++) will both he and she will become  
 6 only one you understand" ((looking at his wife)) (+) it's not  
 7 impossible 'cause on this planet there are two aren't there" (+) so  
 8 it's easy for you to understand (1.9) isn't it" ((looking at his  
 9 wife)) (++) so on THIS planet (++) on THIS PLANET HOME  
 10 (1.5) are you understanding honey" ((asks directly to his  
 11 wife))  
 12 Ialorisha: yes,  
 13 Babalorisha: yeah isn't it like this"  
 14 Ialorisha: yes,  
 15 Babalorisha: no one is supposed to say I am  
 16 in disadvantaged when I make love (++) because all partners will  
 17 have the same pleasure (++) SAME pleasure ((looking at his  
 18 wife)) (++) do you understand"

(Babalorisha: às vezes u::m sente prazer o outro não sente prazer e daí:::  
 nasce brigas ((mudança de lado da fita cassete no gravador))  
 e ele será feliz (2.1) quando fizer o amor do sexo (1.8) porque aqui  
 dentro desse plano ainda existe o amor do sexo (3.9) compreende"  
 ((olhando para sua esposa)) (++) então que que acontece (++)  
 ELE (++) vai os dois vai virá um só compreende" ((olhando para  
 sua esposa)) (+) isso não é impossível não porque aqui na  
 matéria vossas tem dois não tem" (+) então dá pra vóises  
 compreendê (1.9) compreende né" ((olhando para sua esposa))  
 (++) então NESSE plano (++) nesse LAR (1.5) vós tá entendendo  
 rebentazinha" ((pergunta para sua esposa))

Ialorisha: tô  
 Babalorisha: tá né" não é

assim"

Ialorisha: é  
 Babalorisha: ninguém vai falá assim eu tô prejudicado no amor do  
 sexo (++) né" (++) porque todos vão ter o mesmo prazer (++)  
 MESMO prazer ((olhando para sua esposa)) (++) compreende"  
 (+) eu dei exemplos né gente" (++) compreendeu né")

Given that sexual intercourse should follow the ‘felicity condition’ the *avatars* argue for, the *babalorisha* seems to bring this notion into his own marital problems, in a bid to convince his wife that, however the sexual trouble is, love should be of central importance in marriage, even though sexual inequalities might exist. The *babalorisha* goes to the point at issue asking his wife if she agrees with him (lines 10 and 11). Conversely, the *ialorisha*, with low intonation, answers her husband’s question, completely aware of his argumentative intentions (lines 12 and 14). Needless to say that, in this context, the *ialorisha’s* low intonation represents a conversational mark that may express her dissatisfaction with her husband’s explanation and the opening for a new move in the flow of talk as well. As a result, the *babalorisha* continues his discourse affirming that if pure love endures every couple will have pleasure and satisfaction (lines 15 to 18). Again, the *babalorisha* intertwines his own face with the spirit’s who controls him in trance.

After ending the topics related to how the *avatars* have sex, the *babalorisha* initiates a new theme (excerpt 6 below), with the intention of cohering his set of ideas with his communicative practices. At this moment, he presents women as remarkable figures in family relationships. He compares them with medicine-persons, that is, persons who look after their children and their husband, as if prepared to only perform this activity. On the other hand, the *babalorisha* emphasises that the husband is the one whose responsibility relies on maintaining his family, which leads his interlocutors to add considerable sexist weight to the claims of his speech.

(6)

- |    |              |   |                  |
|----|--------------|---|------------------|
| 1  | Babalorisha: | <u>well</u> (++) it is almost outmoded either, isn’t it”                      |                  |
| 2  | Ialorisha:   |   | yes              |
| 3  | Babalorisha: |   | within our       |
| 4  |              | Almighty Father’s Law it’s wrong, isn’t it”                                   |                  |
| 5  | Ialorisha:   |   | yeah             |
| 6  | Babalorisha: |   | but (++)         |
| 7  |              | educating people to the free will to work out and do good is really           |                  |
| 8  |              | beautiful isn’t it” (++) so that’s why there’s the chief and there’s          |                  |
| 9  |              | what I mean is that the woman plays the role of a medicine-person             |                  |
| 10 |              | she is the one who looks after people when they’re ill, isn’t she”            |                  |
| 11 |              | (+) most of the time at home (2.1)  |                  |
| 12 | President:   |   | she medicates    |
| 13 | Babalorisha: |   | medicates, takes |
| 14 |              | care of the children, (+) okay (+) now (1.3) heim” ((looking at Participant)) |                  |
| 15 | Participant: | this still happens but it has already changed’ a lot,                         |                  |

16 Babalorisha: it is changing  
 17 well what I'm saying is ah 'cause I'm going to talk about the avatar  
 18 hierarchy (++) so I've got to show you HOW everything has really  
 19 begun don't I")

(Babalorisha: muito bem (++) já já está quase ultrapassada  
 também num tá")

Ialorisha: tá  
 Babalorisha: (++) na lei do pai tá errado num tá" (1.7) tolher o livre-arbítrio É  
 errado num é"

Ialorisha: é  
 Babalorisha: agora (++) educar para o livre-arbítrio  
 (++) funcioná (++) para o bem (++) é (++) muito embonitado (+)  
 é certo né" (++) então por isso é que tem um chefe (++) e tem (2.0)  
 vamo falá assim (+) a dama funciona como pajé (1.8) ela é que olha  
 as doenças (++) num é isso mesmo" (+) normalmente dentro dum  
 lar (2.1)

President: é dá os remédios  
 Babalorisha: dá os remédios, cuida das cria::nças, (+)  
muito bem (+) agora (1.3) heim" ((olhando para Participant))

Participant: ainda é:::  
 mas já:: mudou' muito,  
 Babalorisha: tá mudando pois é o que eu tô fa- ah (1.7) é  
 porque eu vou falar da hierarquia dos avatares (++) então tem que  
 mostrar COMO começou tu::do (++) não é"

As seen in lines 2 and 5, the *ialorisha* supports, and then acknowledges, the *babalorisha's* arguments. This supportive feature is commonly identified with women's conversational competence (West, 1995) while in interaction with men. According to Holmes (2000: 337), during conversation women "build on each other's contributions, complete each other's utterances, and affirm each other's opinions giving an overall impression of talk as a very cooperative enterprise". In doing so, women are more likely tended to undermine disagreements and give rise to a more cooperative and friendly interaction, often supporting their interlocutors, be them men or women (Fishman, 1997).

Insofar as women usually seek agreement and maintain harmonious relationships with each other (lines 2, 5, and 12), in line 15 the opposite seems to occur. The participant is clearly contrary to the *babalorisha's* assertion *most of the time at home* (line 11). In her point of view, motherly practices are changing, that is, the couple shares with one another the same responsibility for the kids, which indicates that nowadays there is more sharing of domestic chores between husband and wife. Because of this strong counter-argument, the *babalorisha* changes his thematic discourse, as identified with the use of the discourse

marker *well* (line17, cf. Schiffrin, 1987). Once more, this conversational style seems to express his lackadaisical attitude to accept criticisms.

In the following excerpt (7), the *babalorisha* expresses his opinion on some facts that happened during the years of 1995 and 1996 in Brazil, that is to say, suppositions that creatures (or spirits) from other planets were using television, radio, and books (the latter through the medium Chico Xavier) to communicate with people who are still alive. It is worth informing that Chico Xavier, or Francisco Cândido Xavier [1910-2002], was considered the most famous and talented medium throughout the last century. He wrote, under the influence of spirits, more than 350 books and dedicated his whole life to vast charity projects. Spiritualism is still committed to in Brazil. In this conversational context the *babalorisha* affirms, without interrupting the flow of his speech, that these creatures (spirits) are preparing us to believe that only one religion, or belief, is going to be a guiding principle, from whose doctrine people will achieve supreme happiness.

(7)

1 Babalorisha: and things from other planets are showing on television aren't  
 2 they"  
 3 Ialorisha: yeah  
 4 Babalorisha: BOOKS (+) too (+) aren't they"  
 5 Ialorisha: even theatre plays are  
 6 already-  
 7 Babalorisha: that's it  
 8 Ialorisha: -role-playing-  
 9 Babalorisha: yeah  
 10 Ialorisha: -this issue/.../  
 11 Babalorisha: what for" for  
 12 you to have more evolution and reach that point from which we've  
 13 started our talk (+) ONE BELIEF ONLY

(Babalorisha: e já tão aparecendo na televisão coisas de outros (++) OUTROS  
 LARES (+) num tão"  
 Ialorisha: tão  
 Babalorisha: LIVROS (+) também (+) num é"  
 Ialorisha: até  
 peças teatrais já tão-  
 Babalorisha: isso  
 Ialorisha: -colocando-  
 Babalorisha: isso  
 Ialorisha: -esse assunto/  
 Babalorisha: por quê"  
 (2.0) pra que vóises tenham essa evolução e chegá naquilo que nós  
 principiamo a cunversa (+) U::MA CRENÇA SÓ)

By passing his turn to anyone who could give support to his argumentation, through the use of the tag question *aren't they* (lines 1 and 2), the *babalorisha's* argument is sustained by his wife's confirmation (line 3). As we discussed earlier, this encouraging conversational feature is typical of some discursive patterns of women (Fishman, 1997; Holmes, 2000). In lines 7 and 9, however, the opposite seems to take place. Now, the *babalorisha* is the one who corroborates his wife's argumentation, probably in a bid to appropriate her discourse in order to save his own face and acquire more credibility. As the *ialorisha* enhances some of the interactional patterns common to that speech community, the *babalorisha*, so to say, seems to use her arguments to improve his reputation. It is perceived in line 11 when he all of a sudden takes the *ialorisha's* turn, using high intonation (*what for?*), and goes further in his standpoints. In view of this, power is, somehow or other, present in the *babalorisha's* possession discourse, which suggests that he himself probably influences the force of his arguments while in trance, then altering (or eclipsing) in some way the personality of the spirit (male old-black) who controls him.

Throughout the interactive exchange that follows (8), the *babalorisha* differentiates spiritual evolution from material one and assures that the members who follow his teachings will be apt to live in *Raga*, a celestial home, he says, like the biblical paradise (line 1). It seems that he knows beforehand the destiny of his adepts. In excerpt (8) it is noticed that the *babalorisha* gives the impression that he is the direct interpreter of angelical beings named *Avatars*, and besides includes himself as being one of them (*for us*, line 11).

(8)

1	Babalorisha: in Raga you're going to know when you'll be there (+) you see that
2	I'm saying that all of you are spiritually advanced (2.6) you see don't you" so
3	no one might suppose like this I'm going to be exterminated (++)
4	no you are not going to be exterminated 'cause you already have
5	spiritual progress (1.9) the ones who are going to be wiped out are almost
6	animals (++) do you understand" these are the ones who are going
7	wiped out (++) but those who are punished and those who totally
8	lack spiritual advancement (++) I do not mean' intellectual
9	advancement, I mean the spiritual one (++) it's not this stuff of
10	being a doctor or being a worker (++) EVERYBODY IS THE
11	SAME <u>for us</u> (++) do you understand" (++) so evolution belongs
12	to the spirit and sometimes (++) it is said that (+) the old-black
13	is much more advanced than for instance the master who is leading
14	all of you (++) so spiritual evolution has nothing to do with how
15	someone knows how to write or read (++) sometimes the one
16	who doesn't know how to write or read is more advanced than the

17  
18

one who knows (+) or SUPPOSES that knows a lot (++) so that's  
what evolution is all about especially to those who go to Raga/

(Babalarisha: no plano Raga vóises vão conhecê quando forem pra lá (+) tá vendo que eu tô falando que todos vóises tão evoluídos (2.6) tão vendo né” então ninguém precisa pensá assim eh então eu vou ser exterminado (++) não não vai ser exterminado porque vóises têm evolução (1.9) os que vão ser exterminados são quase bichos (++) quase animais (++) compreenderam” esses é que vão ser exterminados (++) agora aqueles que apanharem que tão num num numa falta de adiantamento total (++) num é’ esse adiantamento de sabê lê ou escrevê não, é espiritual (++) não é esse negócio eu sou doutor’ o outro ali eu sou operário, (++) TODOS SÃO IGUAIS pra nós (++) compreenderam” (++) então a evolução é do espírito (++) e às vezes (++) eh como falam (+) o preto-velho é mais evoluído às vezes do que o doutor que tá lá mandando em vós todos (++) então evolução espiritual’ não tem nada com sabê lê e escrevê não, (++) às vezes quem não sabe lê e escrevê é mais evoluído do que o outro que sabe muito (+) PENSA que sabe muito né” (++) então isso que é a evolução que vai pra lá pro plano Raga/ )

In lines 1 and 2, the *babalarisha* enhances his reputation and credibility by affirming that the adepts who go to his religious ceremony and listen to his teachings will live in *Raga* and, then, will not be exterminated. One recurrent discourse strategy the *babalarisha* adopts to keep the conversation going and to reach broader agreement is the use of tag questions, like *don't you*” (line 2) and more to the point questions like *do you understand*” (lines 6 and 11). Moreover, in an attempt to provide support to his ‘salvation’ hypothesis, the *babalarisha* assures that our evolution does not depend upon intellectual development, as seen in lines 8, 9, 10, and 11; by contrast, only spiritual improvement is recognised as being the sole criterion for personal salvation, which probably denotes that general knowledge is not required for this. As an instance of this, the male old-black spirit who controls the *babalarisha* in trance declares himself as a spiritual guide who possesses more improved qualities than many people who know how to write and read (lines 12, 13, 14, and 15). Both the *babalarisha* and the male old-black spirit assume their leadership roles, that is to say, their *footings* of effective control over the members of the religious ceremony.

In the following excerpt (9), the president (woman) suddenly takes the *babalarisha*'s turn (line 2). Albeit the *babalarisha* attempts to end up his talk, he sees himself forced to change his *footing* in order to answer the president's question (line 4). At

the very moment the president, baldly on record, uttered the discourse marker *hold on* (line 2), considered an atypical linguistic behaviour of women (cf. Lakoff, 1975; Fishman, 1997; Holmes, 2000; Tannen, 1994), the *babalorisha* re-established his *footing* according to the *frame* of the context, as seen in line 4 below (*yeah*).

(9)

- 1 Babalorisha: I think it's enough for today/.../  
 2 President: hold on' my father, (++) let me ask you  
 3 something,  
 4 Babalorisha: yeah  
 5 President: it's (++) my cute doggy (++) where does he go when  
 6 he dies"  
 7 Babalorisha: it depends on his evolution/.../  
 8 President: no/.../  
 9 Babalorisha: NOW' (+) let me explain  
 10 you asked me (++) IF HE is a::n a::ni[mal/.../  
 11 Vice-President: [he's very evolved  
 12 Babalorisha: yes you have  
 13 more evolved animals than others don't you"  
 14 President: this I [know/.../  
 15 Babalorisha: [WELL' i::f he::  
 16 undergoes his his (2.1) mission here without mistakes' he'll go to  
 17 this planet home I've just told you about (+) well it's enough for today/  
  
 (Babalorisha: acho que por hoje chega/.../  
 President: péra aí meu pai (++) agora deixa eu te  
 Perguntá uma coisa  
 Babalorisha: sei  
 President: é (++) meu cachorrinho pequenininho  
 quando ele morrê ele vai pra onde"  
 Babalorisha: depende da evolução  
 dele  
 President: não/.../  
 Babalorisha: PÉRA' (+) deixa eu explicá (+) vós me perguntô (++) SE  
 ELE fo::r u::m a::ni[mal/.../  
 Vice-President: [ele é muito evoluído  
 Babalorisha: é vós tem animais  
 mais evoluído do que outros né"  
 President: isso eu [sei/.../  
 Babalorisha: [AGORA se:: ele:: prestá  
 (++) aa (2.1) a missão dele aqui (++) sem erros' ele já vai  
 pra esse plano que eu falei pra vós (+) bom por hoje chega/

The directive use of *hold on* (line 2), baldly on record, by the president changed the whole *frame* of the social encounter, which also changed the *footing* of the participants, especially the *babalorisha's* one. After listening to the president (lines 5 and 6), the

*babalorisha* could not afford her any other opportunity to express herself, which is seen in lines 9 and 15, when he raises his intonation (*NOW' / WELL'*) and overlaps her turn. The *babalorisha*, thus, by assuming this linguistic behaviour, left the impression that he revenged himself on the president, as if he wanted to hurt her in return. Consequently, instantiations of power, common to institutional discourses, seem to be present in his speech. This conversational style, however, is not expected from the male old black who possesses him in trance.

### **Final remarks**

This paper has suggested that instantiations of power seem to be common to the *babalorisha's* conversational style, which, in turn, either overshadows the personality of the male old-black spirit who possesses him in trance or intertwines different discursive styles, so to say, a mixture of imposition and kindness. In addition, this paper has demonstrated that the linguistic behaviour adopted by the *babalorisha* is not the one the edicts of *umbanda* usually issue. On the contrary, Christian postulates of charity and a spirit of indulgence and forgiveness, the core of *umbanda's* doctrine, should be practised by all members of this religion.

During the year 2003, I showed the results of this research to the *babalorisha* in order to reflect on the main findings this study has presented. One basic concern of mine was to keep an open-minded behaviour and to show flexibility in deciding how to interpret the linguistic results this research had led me to. The *babalorisha* informed me that it is rather common the influence of the medium over the spirit who controls her/him in trance, given that, according to him, there isn't in fact a total personification of the entities or *orishas* who are praised during the ceremonies, which may cause a kind of mixture of both personality traits, that is, the medium's and the spirit's personalities. Therefore, it would be problematic to regard mediumistic possession a kind of hoax, since this religious phenomenon is of central importance to the constitution of the cult itself. Having this idea in mind, far from holding an opinion that possession phenomena turn out to be untrue, this research, by contrast, tries to widen new space to the studies of *umbanda* religious rituals in

Brazil, which has thus far belonged solely to the scope of Anthropology and Ethnography analyses.

Admittedly, if we do not consider how discourse contributes to the comprehension of ceremonial interaction and its discursive practices, the manoeuvres speakers perform while using language to share religious experiences with each other are brushed aside. So regarding that Discourse Analysis uses methodological tools from Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, as well as Linguistics *per se*, we realise that Interactional Sociolinguistics and Conversational Analysis may be important scientific arrays to help explain most of the questions our data have been raising so far, and those that, in one way or another, still remain unanswered.

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