

# ACCENT AND TV JOURNALISM: NORTHEASTERN MEDIA COMMUNICATORS REPRESENTATIONS

## *Sotaque e Telejornalismo: Representações de Comunicadores de Mídia Nordestinos*

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** to describe the content of social representations of the northeastern media communicator regarding to its accent. **Methods:** data collection was carried out in two steps. At first, the free association was performed, in which 50 university students showed what they thought at the word “accent”. In the second, through the Multiple Classifications Procedure (PCM), 25 communicators, who work in the Metropolitan Region of Recife, classified the 15 words most associated by students in two ways, free and guided. In free classification, communicators grouped the words according to criteria set by them, while in directed classification, the words were classified according to the degree of association with the term MY ACCENT. The analysis was carried out by multidimensional statistic methods, which allowed the construction of the Social Representations field’s structure. **Results:** three defined regions revealed the representation about accent: Concept, Identity and Space. In the first, there are six categories (funny, different, dragged, *matuto*, prejudice, *oxente*), in the second, the words are identity, characteristic, language, speech and culture, which are next to the term my accent, and, in the third, region, regionalism, northeast and locality. Identity was the term most related to the term MY ACCENT, whereas the items less related were the ones at the concept region, except for the term *oxente*. **Conclusion:** the northeastern accent is regarded as a mark of the identity and culture from Northeast region. Communicators soften characteristics from northeastern speech during the Professional practice to be adapted to the standard recommended by the labor market without losing their identity.

**KEYWORDS:** Mass Media; Journalism; Psychology, Social

### ■ INTRODUCTION

The term accent refers to a set of articulatory habits that confer a particular, social, dialectal or foreign color, social dialect or foreign to each individual’s speech<sup>1</sup>. It is related only with the pronunciation, different from dialect, which refers to grammar and vocabulary<sup>2</sup>. Different accents behave as social practices whose form and function are important, representing qualities associated with certain speakers’ communities<sup>3</sup>.

All languages have variations, and the accent is among the variant features, making it impossible to speak a variation of a language without some kind of accent. The variety considered standard in one language is not determined by linguistic factors, but for political, economic and social reasons, predominantly. In Brazil, the high degree of dialects and accents diversity is due to the large territory and social diversity, so that the various types of accent vary according to different areas socio-cultural characteristics<sup>4</sup>.

Some regional peculiarities often cause strangeness among other listeners of other regions of the country. The linguistic prejudice is one of the facets of the regional prejudice, since the accent is one of the mainly cultural identifiers of territoriality<sup>5</sup>. The more discredited or socially inferior

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Funding: FACEPE (Masters Scholarship)

Conflict of interest: non-existent

accent variants in Brazil are the ones spoken in the Northeast of the country. The Northeast region has suffered several types of prejudice, and among them, it is the linguistic one, expressed in relation to aspects of this region way of speaking<sup>6</sup>.

The media admit several language variations. There is still some media vehicles, especially when it comes to journalism, that keep the defense of a standardization, based on a convention on the sonority<sup>4</sup>.

Over the years, it has been observed the accents softening practice in television journalism<sup>5</sup>. It is believed that different forms of pronunciation can mark noise in the communication and broadcast of the news, as well as putting the news in the background. The standardization of the pronunciation pattern has become common, and even representative of journalists' speech. Thus, regional marks softened speech has become an important part in this professional communication style, and being even adopted on local TV news. Therefore, currently, the standard accent in journalistic narrative is constituted as an outstanding feature of this group<sup>7,8</sup>.

Communicators constitute a particular social group, in which there are the journalists, which is identified based on collective values, that implies a subjective self-concept and well-being related to the group norms and rules<sup>9</sup>. The study of Social Representations of northeastern media communicators about their accent can provide information on how these professionals think and interpret their accent in the professional practice. It is understood that the Social Representations are specific phenomena related to the way of understanding and communicating with the world and the others, creating reality and common sense. It is a practical knowledge that gives meaning to events that are normal, allowing the social construction of reality<sup>10</sup>. Thereby, the study of Social Representations can contribute to the comprehension of social thought expressed in the symbolic network of this group as a system of reality interpretation<sup>11</sup>.

To understand the structure of the Social Representation, it was used, in this research, the Facet Theory (FT). From a multidimensional approach, this theory offers adequate support for analysis by considering the interrelationships of social, historical, cultural, emotional and psychological phenomena, offering a global vision of the phenomenon with its various component facets, which responds satisfactorily to this research proposal<sup>12</sup>.

Considering these assumptions, the purpose of the current study was to describe the content of

social representations of the northeastern media communicator regarding to its accent.

## ■ METHODS

The current study was approved by the Ethics and Human Research Committee of the Federal University of Pernambuco (CEP / CCS / UFPE), under the advice of number 610.732. The research has transversal, descriptive and exploratory nature, guided by a quantitative and qualitative approach, based on the Social Representations Theory and the Facet Theory<sup>12</sup>.

### Characterization of Participants

75 people participated in the study, of which 50 were in the first stage of collect, or "free association stage" and 25 people were in the second stage or "Multiple Classifications Procedure" (PCM) stage<sup>13</sup>. The first stage was held with university students, while in the second one, the participants were northeastern communicators. The research collect, in both stages, occurred in the Metropolitan Area of Recife, and all the interviews took place in person.

The free association was performed with university students so that communicators participate in classifications only. The evocations in free association reflect the representation of a larger group of people (northeastern, higher education, upper level), so that it can be classified by another subset of that group, namely communicators (also northeastern, higher education).

No age restrictions were carried out (only obeying the legal age criterion), or sex ones. The university students should be properly enrolled in an undergraduate course at UFPE, namely from the Arts and Communication Center (CAC), Health Sciences Center (CCS) or Technology and Geosciences Center (CTG). For communicators, the criterion obeyed was the activity in northeastern media, as anchors/hosts or street reporters.

Participants who were excluded: 1) the ones who had not been born and (or) grown up in the Northeast; and 2) the ones who not acted on TV in the Northeast. This criterion was used for it is a survey of the Social Representation of northeastern media communicators due to the recurring practice of accent softening in this group.

The communicators sample was characterized as follows:

**Sex:** Of the total of 25 participants, 16 (64%) were female and nine (36%) were male. **Age:** The average age was 30.76 years old, as the minimum age was 21 years and the maximum age was 51 years. **Time after graduation in higher education (graduation in the media area):** The average time

after graduation was 7.84 years, as the minimum time was 1 year and the maximum was 30 years.

**Time of working in the profession:** The average time of working was 10.08, as the minimum time was 1 year and the maximum was 28 years. **Job:** In relation to the job performed, 10 (40%) worked as anchors or hosts, while 15 (60%) worked as reporters. For categorization purposes, the group of anchors/hosts will be defined as “hosts”, because despite being able to perform other functions, such as chief editor, the anchor also works as a host<sup>14</sup>. **TV broadcaster:** Communicators from 7 different TV broadcasters participated in the research.

### Collect Procedure

Participants of the first stage were approached individually or in small groups at UFPE campus. Communicators were contacted via email and social networks. There was a Free and Informed Consent Term specific to each research participating group. After reading and signing of the term by the participant, the collect was performed. All subjects answered a brief questionnaire to characterize the sample.

The collect offered no difficulty, in contrast to that, participants were surprised by the simplicity of the tasks. After receiving explanation that there was no right or wrong answers, only interest in the opinion of participants, the collection flowed without difficulties.

The first stage was the **Free Association stage**, in which, the university student wrote the words that come to mind with the stimulus word ACCENT. There was no maximum time stipulated to perform the task nor a maximum limit of words. From this survey, fifteen items, that were most frequently associated with the stimulus word by the students, were selected. These items were used for the classifications carried out by the communicators in the second stage.

In the second stage of the research, or **stage of Multiple Classifications Procedure (PCM)**, there were two distinct tasks. The material for the research consisted of 15 cards, sized 10x5cm, each containing the description of an item selected from those more often associated with the stimulus word ACCENT. Another card with the term MY ACCENT was also presented, total of 16 cards.

The first task was the **free classification** of 16 items, which were categorized by each participant so that all the words of a group possessed something in common that made them different from the other words in other groups.

In the second task, there was the **directed classification** from the targeted group of 15 words (which were collected in the first stage of the

research) in five pre-established groups according to the degree of association with the term “my accent”: highly related words, much related words, words more or less related, lowly related words and zero associated words. The purpose of this classification was to understand, in details, the structure of relations between the regions. For the application of this stage, the experimenter placed in descending order five different size cards, so that each card represented a degree of association with the above term. The researcher wrote down the classifications performed by the communicators, as well as the explanations for the creation of groups in free classification, at the time of collection.

### Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected from the records were typed and transported to databases. Statistical analysis was performed by the research team using the SPSS Statistics program, 20.0, for the variables of the study and data analysis.

To explore the kind of regionalization of the displayed items and their relationship with the accent, free and directed classifications were analyzed using the Smallest Space Analysis – SSA, or Similarity Structure Analysis. The SSA is basically a multidimensional non-metric scaling, where the proximity is the fundamental principle, namely, the more similar the observations are in terms of definition, the nearest they will be empirically, thus creating regions of contiguity or noncontiguity. Thereby, it is possible to get a map of the variables in terms of geometric spaces of minimal dimensionality<sup>13,15</sup>.

Due to non-normal distribution of variables, it has been chosen to analyze the results using non-parametric analysis were performed using the Kruskal-Wallis test when considering the functions performed by the communicators.

## ■ RESULTS

### Free Association

From the free association to the word ACCENT 270 words were obtained, of which 93 were different (on average, each student produced 5.4 words). After being placed in order of highest frequency of evocations, the fifteen most often items associated with the stimulus word were selected to be classified by communicators in the second stage of the study (Table 1). Fifty-eight words appeared only once in evocations, what justifies the fact that the frequencies were not high, despite the large amount of words evoked.

**Table 1 – Items and percentages of items produced from the free association**

Items and percentages	Items and percentages	Items and percentages
01 Region (11,1%)	06 <i>Matuto</i> (3,3%)	11 Different (2,6%)
02 Culture (4,4%)	07 Northeast (3,3%)	12 Locality (2,6%)
03 Language (4,4%)	08 <i>Oxente</i> (3,3%)	13 Regionalism (2,6%)
04 Speech (3,7%)	09 Prejudice (3,3%)	14 Dragged (1,8%)
05 Identity (3,3%)	10 Characteristic (2,6%)	15 Funny (1,8%)

### Free Classification

In the first activity, we asked each participant to categorize the words presented in groups. The number of groups formed per communicator varied widely, 2-6 groups per participant, the criteria used for their formation also varied. The association matrix regarding the free classification of words is presented below (Table 2), where there are 15

words, besides term MY ACCENT, listed at the time of the first stage of this research and the number of times they were categorized in the same group.

As the survey was conducted with a sample of 25 communicators, the maximum number of times that a category may be associated with each other in a group is 25 times, since it is a simple count without special statistics treatment.

**Table 2 – Association matrix among the items in free classification (n=25)**

	Region	Culture	Language	Speech	Identity	<i>Matuto</i>	Northeast	<i>Oxente</i>	Prejudice	Characteristic	Different	Locality	Regionalism	Dragged	Funny
Region	-														
Culture	11	-													
Language	2	7	-												
Speech	3	5	13	-											
Identity	4	13	10	6	-										
<i>Matuto</i>	3	4	4	4	3	-									
Northeast	18	6	1	2	4	4	-								
<i>Oxente</i>	8	5	4	3	4	12	7	-							
Prejudice	5	7	4	2	5	13	9	6	-						
Characteristic	5	10	6	5	15	4	4	4	4	-					
Different	3	6	1	4	5	10	3	6	10	10	-				
Locality	16	7	7	4	6	1	12	4	6	5	3	-			
Regionalism	16	8	5	4	4	2	15	4	3	7	5	14	-		
Dragged	1	0	3	7	4	15	4	13	7	6	9	3	3	-	
Funny	1	4	7	7	2	16	3	13	11	3	12	3	1	15	-
My Accent	7	6	12	9	8	4	5	6	5	8	6	4	6	1	3

The strongest association was found between the categories northeast and region (18) which represents a simple association, since the Northeast corresponds to a region. There was also a strong association between the categories locality and region, regionalism and region (16), regionalism and Northeast (15), which are consistent with geographic aspects, so there is the strong association between these words. Besides those, there was a strong association between the terms funny and *matuto* (16), funny and dragged (15), and *matuto* and dragged (15), what indicates that communicators relate being *matuto* with the dragged accent characteristic, and both can be considered funny. Another strong association happened between the terms characteristic and identity (15), which may indicate that, in the opinion of communicators, identity is formed by inherent characteristics of each individual. It is important to highlight the weak association between the term my accent and the terms dragged (1) and funny (3), showing that communicators do not associate their accent that way.

Criteria used in clusters according to the communicators were mostly related to the issue of separating the words according to geographic aspects, speech characteristics as well as words related to behavior related to one another.

The SSA statistical treatment was performed with the data matrix presented and the results regarding to the distance of category groups are shown in Figure 1. From this map it is possible to see three distinct areas. At the first, considering the left to the right, closer to the bottom, there are six categories (funny, different, dragged, *matuto*, prejudice, *oxente*), at the second one, located in the upper right area, the words identity, characteristic, language, speech and culture are close to the term "my accent" and at the third one, in the lower right area, the categories are region, regionalism, Northeast and location. It is important to highlight that the word culture is also nearby this third area, which may indicate that it is also related to aspects present in this area.

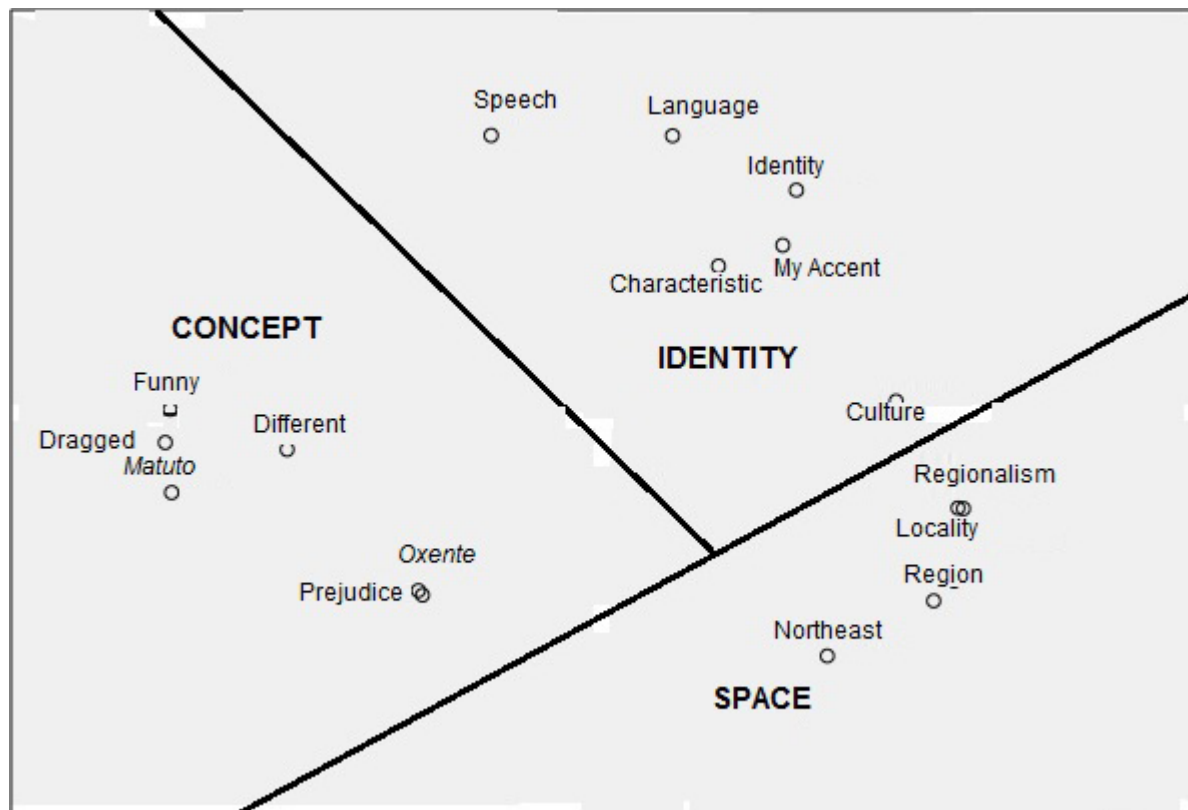


Figure 1 – Smallest Space Analysis of the association among the items of free classification



From this map, three areas were highlighted that can be named as follows: The first, which includes six categories connected to features and behaviors that are conceived in the thought about something or someone, was named **Concept**, the second, which includes the categories most related to the inherent characteristics of each individual, **Identity**, and the third, with the cluster of words related to aspects of location, **Space**.

Through the spatial configuration of the map, it is possible to notice that the areas Space and Identity are close to each other. The area Space presents his items close to each other on the map, marking a greater relationship between the present items.

### Directed Classification

The directed classification occurred from the directed grouping of 15 words (which were collected in the first stage of the research) in five pre-established groups according to the degree of association with the term "my accent": highly related words, much related words, words more or less related, lowly related words and zero associated words. The

purpose of this classification was to understand, in details, the structure of relations between the regions.

Table 3 describes the categorization of the 15 items performed by communicators, considering the functions they perform. Only a few items have statistically significant differences between the ratings of reporters and hosts when considered distinctly, "region" ( $p = .004$ ), "Northeast" ( $p = .020$ ) and "locality" ( $p = .002$ ), which confirms that, in general, there are no major differences in the representations when considering the work performed. It is observed that the word most associated with the northeastern accent by the communicators was "identity". Doing the same exercise with the lowest average, namely, words less associated, the items found were: "matuto", "prejudice", "different," "funny" and "dragged".

In order to visualize the degree of interrelationship among the items, an SSA analysis was held (Figure 2) using the Monotonicity Coefficient (Table 4).

**Table 3 – Comparative analysis of the classification of items according to the functions performed by communicators**

	Street Reporter		Host		Total		K-W	
	Average	SD	Average	SD	Average	SD	Qui <sup>2</sup>	P
Region	4.53	0.64	3.00	1.33	3.92	1.22	<b>8.24</b>	<b>0.004</b>
Culture	4.40	0.82	3.50	1.50	4.04	1.20	2.35	0.125
Language	4.07	1.03	4.00	1.24	4.04	1.09	0.01	0.976
Speech	4.27	1.03	4.10	0.99	4.20	1.00	0.36	0.546
Identity	4.73	0.45	4.50	0.70	4.64	0.56	0.66	0.414
Matuto	1.67	1.04	2.00	1.24	1.80	1.11	0.79	0.373
Northeast	4.73	0.45	3.70	1.16	4.32	0.94	<b>5.44</b>	<b>0.020</b>
Oxente	3.47	1.50	3.20	1.47	3.36	1.46	0.23	0.628
Prejudice	2.07	1.48	2.40	1.35	2.20	1.41	0.78	0.375
Characteristic	3.67	1.34	3.90	0.73	3.76	1.12	0.01	0.907
Different	2.33	1.44	2.60	1.43	2.44	1.41	0.26	0.606
Locality	4.40	1.12	3.20	0.91	3.92	1.18	<b>9.59</b>	<b>0.002</b>
Regionalism	4.47	0.83	3.80	1.13	4.20	1.00	2.28	0.131
Dragged	2.93	1.03	2.80	1.47	2.88	1.20	0.13	0.709
Funny	2.33	1.39	2.10	1.37	2.24	1.36	0.19	0.660

Kruskal-Wallis Test:  $p < 0.05$

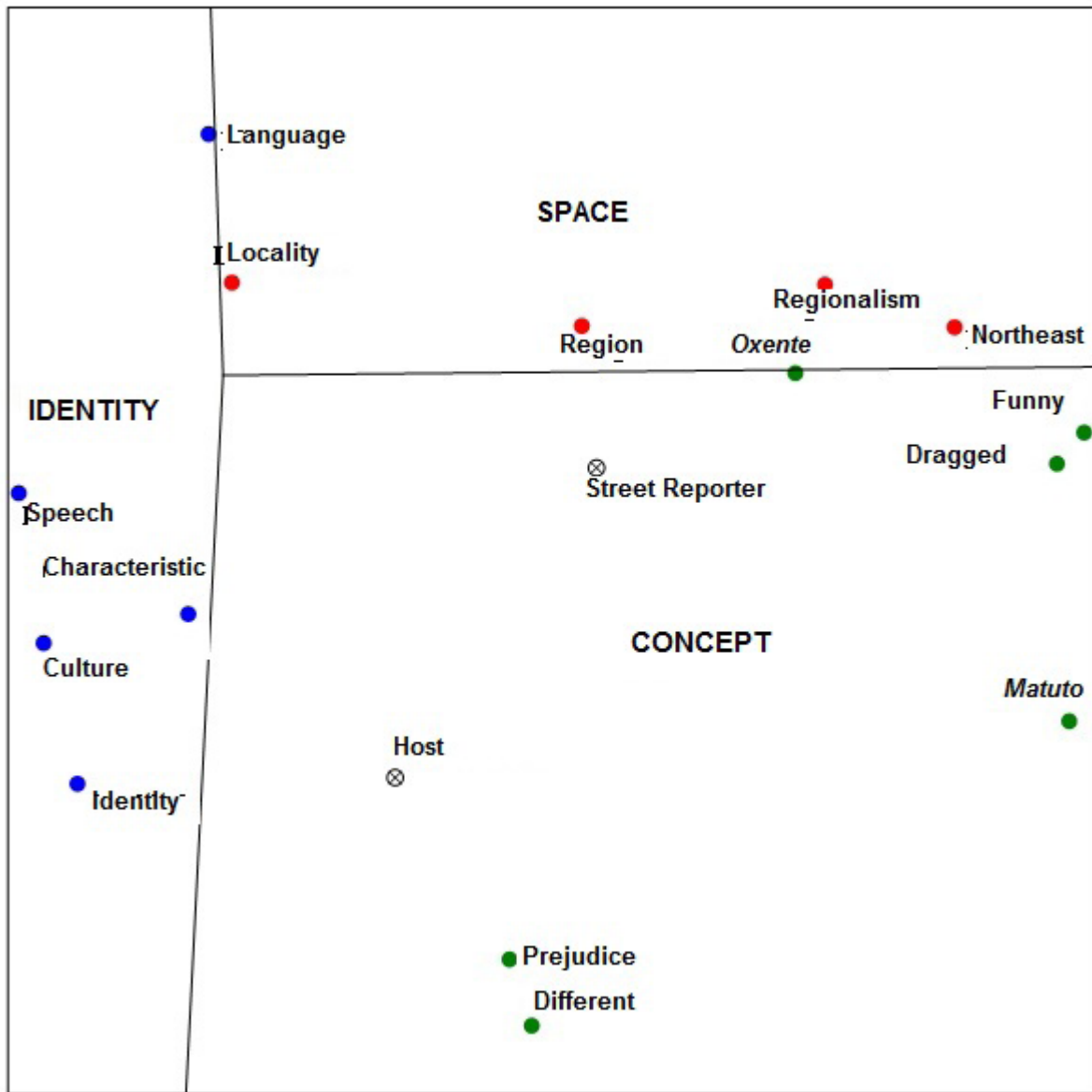


Figure 2 – Smallest Space Analysis of the classifications among the items of directed classification, considering the functions performed by communicators (Coordinate 1 vs Coordinate 2 describing the Three-Dimensional Projection. Guttman-Lingoes Alienation Coefficient: 0.12)

**Table 4 – Inter-relationship matrix among items ordered (monotonicity coefficient), considering the functions performed by communicators**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Region	1	100	44	-5	-10	54	-2	65	59	-3	-31	-16	45	67	30	18
Culture	2	44	100	-16	68	74	-25	-32	34	-26	19	15	52	-14	-56	-64
Language	3	-5	-16	100	76	-22	-78	-2	10	-33	29	-79	25	-1	-9	-24
Speech	4	-10	68	76	100	52	-51	-42	1	11	49	-26	8	-23	-62	-71
Identity	5	54	74	-22	52	100	-49	-57	-52	18	26	20	51	-53	-61	-57
<i>Matuto</i>	6	-2	-25	-78	-51	-48	100	47	56	42	-79	43	-41	39	73	69
Northeast	7	65	-32	-2	-42	-57	47	100	36	8	-62	8	-3	86	79	85
<i>Oxente</i>	8	59	34	10	1	-52	56	36	100	-32	-64	-3	-14	29	51	13
Prejudice	9	-3	-26	-33	11	18	42	8	-32	100	-47	58	-20	21	2	-16
Characteristic	10	-31	19	29	49	26	-79	-62	-64	-47	100	-41	-30	-41	-66	-42
Different	11	-16	15	-79	-26	20	43	8	-3	58	-41	100	-32	-1	11	-2
Locality	12	45	52	25	8	51	-41	-3	-14	-20	-30	-32	100	9	7	-2
Regionalism	13	67	-14	-1	-23	-53	39	86	29	21	-41	-1	9	100	43	64
Dragged	14	30	-56	-9	-62	-61	73	79	51	2	-66	11	7	43	100	69
Funny	15	18	-64	-24	-71	-57	69	85	13	-16	-42	-2	-2	64	69	100
<b>EXTERNAL VARIABLE</b>																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Host	18	-88	-63	-6	-16	-42	29	-83	-16	22	21	17	-78	-57	-10	-16
Street.Reporter	19	88	63	6	16	42	-29	83	16	-22	-21	-17	78	57	10	16

Note: Original coefficients were multiplied by 100.

The items with the highest associations with each other were: Regionalism x Northeast (0.86) and Funny x Northeast (0.85), and there is also a strong association between the items Dragged x Northeast (0.79), Speech x Language (0.76), Identity x Culture (0.74). It is interesting to notice that there were many negative relations, like Different x Language (-0.79) and Characteristic x *Matuto* (-0.79), as well as *Matuto* x Language (-0.78). Regarding the association with external variables, there was a great approach of the variable street reporter to region (0.88), Northeast (0.83) and location (0.78).

Figure 2 shows the results of the directed classification through the SSA with their external variables Host and Street Reporter. In this projection, it is possible to notice the existence of three regions, the same as the ones in the free classification. The region called Space is seen at the top of the projection, on the right, whose items are "region", "regionalism", "location" and "northeast". In this region, only the word "location" is further away, lying very close to the region called Identity, and other items are closer to each other and closer to the region Concept, especially the word "*oxente*" that is in a border area between the regions Space and Concept. On the left, there is the region called Identity, whose items are "tongue", "characteristic", "speech", "culture" and "identity"; the word "language" is in a borderline area

with the region Space. At the bottom of the opposite side, there is the region called Concept, whose items are "*oxente*", "funny", "dragged" "*matuto*", "prejudice" and "different." In this area, the items are further apart from each other and it is possible to notice a strong relationship between the terms "prejudice" and "different," and between the terms "dragged" and "funny", which, in turn, are close to the word "Northeast" that belongs to the region called Space. It is important to declare that the item "my accent" does not appear in the directed classification because it was the term chosen with which the subjects determined the degree of association of the other words.

It is observed that the items "funny", "dragged" and "*oxente*" are in a borderline area with the region Space, very close to the items "northeast" and "regionalism", which may indicate the relationship of these concepts connected to the northeastern accent as an expression of regionalism in the Northeast.

## ■ DISCUSSION

The main interest of this research was to analyze the structural organization of social representations of northeastern media communicators about accent in order to describe the content of these



representations. Thus, it was pursued to establish, objectively, the level of agreement in this professional group, in relation to the social representation of accent.

In the multidimensional analysis of the classifications that were performed, it is possible to clearly distinguish three major groups called respectively Space, Identity and Concept. In the first, the following items were found: "regionalism", "locality", "region" and "Northeast". These items are closely related to each other and when compared to the others, they constitute the smallest group, although the most solid. The relation among these items can also be observed in the directed classification. From the justifications given by the subjects for the groups created, in free classification, it can be said that the guiding criterion for the formation of this group was the relation to a specific region, the Northeast, which is in one location and presents its own regionalism. In addition, the accent is a regional practice, so that regional accents may be related to any location within a country as well as in different countries who speak the same language<sup>2</sup>.

During the Modern Art Movement in Brazil, it was necessary to find a national identity that was different from the European identity. At that moment, the great Brazilian cities received a lot of influence from Europe. In this scenery, the Northeast appears oblivious to this influence, so that a different representation of this region is built, based on the image of the backcountry and drought, which becomes a social process. The idea that it creates, then, is that the entire Northeast is wilderness, and all wilderness is rural with a maximum of small urban centers, which does not correspond to reality. Regionalism, in this context, not only differentiates one region from another, but places two geographical macro-regions, Northeast and Southeast, as antagonistic and opposite. In this context, the media itself is a major factor that contributes to the formation of the stereotype of the Northeast and northeastern people<sup>5,6,16</sup>.

Thus, regionalism is presented as the expression of a region, an expression that is manifested in speech, as a diversity of accents. According to the SSA projection maps, there is a strong link between culture and locality, and regionalism is a cultural expression of each region. Within a single state, there are regions that differ from each other in cultures, people and different geographical aspects<sup>16</sup>. The accent is one of the main cultural identifiers of territoriality, "denouncing" the origin of the subject. In the case of the Northeast this source relates, in the national imagination, to a series of stereotypes, as that this region is a poor and dry place, with poor

and uneducated population, but in most cases this value assignment becomes mistaken<sup>5</sup>.

It is interesting to notice that the region Identity is less homogeneous in free classification, which indicates that the identity of communicators regarding to their accent still does not have a well-defined concept. This setting, in SSA projection, confirms the literature considering that the definition of an identity is an ongoing process that occurs in a dynamic and continuous way<sup>17</sup>. Thus, it can infer that this conception is still in process, as well as the identity of communicators themselves, which is still being built along the history of the profession in Brazil<sup>18</sup>. The term "my accent", present in this region, refers to the accent of the population of the study, namely the northeastern accent. This term is very close identity and characteristics, confirming the literature that states that different accents serve as social practices that represent qualities associated with certain speakers' communities<sup>3</sup>. So, it may represent the characteristic of a population and its identity<sup>5</sup>.

The proximity, in SSA projections, of the items "speech" and "language" express something that was noticed in the explanations, as the subjects said that the two terms were related, although there is not a specific justification for this relation, on their opinion. Thus, the concepts of speech and language are not well defined for this population. Language is understood as a systematic and conventional use of sounds, signs and written symbols in a society for communication and expression, characterizing the spoken/written behavior in a community, while speech is a mediator of sound transmission of language, and each language specifically<sup>2</sup>.

The region "Concept" was named this way because it represents the formulation of ideas about the object of study, consisting in an expressed opinion, which can be good or bad. In this region of SSA projection, the items "oxente", "prejudice", "funny", "different", "dragged" and "matuto" were found. The presence of the word prejudice in this region indicates its existence, or a previously formed concept of the characteristics represented by the other terms of the group. By the setting of this region, it is observed that there is a pre-established concept with what is different. Prejudice refers to an orientation, followed by discriminatory practice and behavior of an individual or a group of individuals, in relation to another social group<sup>19</sup>. This happens when groups of people identify and see what is different in a prejudiced manner<sup>20</sup>. This group, according to the explanations given by the subjects, is more related to the concept presented by others in relation to the northeastern accent than their own

concept, which is represented in the region called Identity.

The prejudice against the Northeast is not only manifest in the form of linguistic discrimination related to speech, but derives from a process related to history. As it is confused with Wilderness, which is seen as an underdeveloped place when compared to other places<sup>16</sup>, the Northeast is victimized by a succession of clichés that root prejudice, so naturalized, they are made subjective by a whole population<sup>6</sup>. This type of prejudice is present in the mass media, as in soap operas, in which the main generalization comes across northeastern people as inland people, as if a term was synonymous with the other, because when it comes to the wilderness, soap operas do not distinguish between countryside and urban district<sup>16</sup>. As in the soap operas, prejudice is also seen on TV news and can be seen in the exclusion of the speaker's identity marks, namely in the regional accent modification to a more acceptable accent by media<sup>21</sup>.

It is possible to see the strong relations between the terms *matuto*, dragged and *oxente*. *Matuto* is the term that refers to the stereotype of the social character of the least favored class of Northeast wilderness area<sup>22,23</sup>, and, as seen before, all the Northeast is seen as wilderness. Therefore, every northeastern people can be seen as *matuto*, regardless of the location where they live<sup>6,16</sup>. *Oxente* is a word that characterizes the northeastern speech, while dragged is a term that expresses a characteristic of speech, not necessarily related to northeastern speech, as it has already been found describing the accent of São Paulo countryside<sup>24</sup>. Considering the explanations given by the subjects, "*oxente* is a characteristic of the Northeast." Thus, they define the term *oxente* as an expression that characterizes northeastern speech<sup>25</sup>, even when admitting that there are differences between distinct localities in the Northeast and that this term may not be as used elsewhere as it is in the state of Pernambuco, where the survey was conducted. Therefore, the relationship between these words can occur due to being related to the image that was built about Northeast.

In directed classification, it is possible to see that all items less related to northeastern accent belong to the region called Concept in the SSA projection of free classification, namely "*matuto*", "funny", "prejudice," "different" and "dragged". Prejudice expressed in relation to the accent derives from the social and regional prejudice, when a region is considered inferior to the other, and then, its way of speaking also suffers prejudice, known as linguistic prejudice<sup>21</sup>. Society got used to assign to a place or a group of speakers the "best" or "worst"

Portuguese<sup>26</sup>. This prejudice is not limited to not value certain regional varieties, but mainly because it considers "wrong" varieties spoken by people who belong to other social classes when they do not comprehend the standard variant, the one learned at school, or a prestigious variety<sup>27</sup>.

The most associated items with the northeastern accent are in the regions Space and Identity, it is interesting to note the word "identity", which appears well associated by hosts and reporters. The accent is known as one of the main, if not the main one, cultural identity elements of a people<sup>21</sup>, as it emerges as the expression of regionalism in speech<sup>22</sup>. In a study on the construction of the identity of a region of Brazil, which had its historical and cultural development started after other regions such as the Northeast, where the country began to be colonized, the presence of the accent as an important element in this construction is seen<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, the results of this study agree with that one, so it is possible to affirm the importance of the accent as a people identifier.

In another study, conducted with foreigners living in Brazil, interviewees said that they keep their accent as a mark of their identity as a foreigner, so they believe that their place of origin will always be recognized, regardless of their residence in Brazil for years and absorbing other Brazilian population habits<sup>29</sup>. Identity is not built in a mechanical and absolute way, since its construction is inherent to social dynamics. The return to the locality expresses a sense of belonging, which is characterized as social identity and is usually related to criteria relating to specific locations and strong personal connection, and the speech of that place, one of these identification criteria<sup>17</sup>.

Although when it comes to identity, there was a strong relation between this term and culture, which is confirmed by the literature. One of the biggest factors to identify the individual is his culture and the attitude that he assumes regarding his language. Thus, culture illustrates the strongest traits of a particular identity, as the clothes, gestures, behavior and speech identify people and communities. The identity of the language is the identity of culture; if all cultures should be valued, then all language identities and their nuances, like the accent, should also be valued<sup>30,31</sup>.

In a recent research with active media communicators in a state in the Northeast, 90% of the interviewees said that the way words are pronounced (accent) has strong influence on the television journalist career. Furthermore, most participants reported that the accent influences the narration and transmission of reported facts. And, for 100% of interviewees, the accent should be softened with

regards to television journalism<sup>22</sup>, what confirms what was observed in the speech of the interviewees in this study, when explaining the free classifications.

For communicators, in both surveys, the softened speech pattern is beneficial to the formation of news and public understanding, although they claim that they do not use the softened pattern when not in professional practice. This reinforces the idea that for a professional to consolidate nationally, it is necessary to demonstrate control over the accent, which is a strong defining element of the career of a television journalist<sup>22</sup>. Thus, despite the increasing number of broadcasting stations in different regions of the country, they serve as signal relay of the major media vehicles that are situated in the Southeast. Therefore, the regionalization of these local media is not perceived, so people eventually get used to the softened accent, by eliminating the local linguistic characteristics<sup>7,8,21</sup>.

In this context, speech therapy practice with professionals working in the media, and especially in journalism, has gone under a major transformation, so that the concern for improving communication aspects has gained more space. The accent is one of the complaints from journalists to look for a speech therapist. So, in addition to vocal improvement, it is important to broaden perspectives of speech therapy for expression and communication improvement issues in these professionals<sup>32,33</sup>.

Considering the results according to the work performed, it is observed that there are no major differences in the representations, which is to be expected since both hosts and reporters have similar experiences with the accent and the performance in the labor market. The few differences, therefore, are due to the fact that the reporter has greater contact with the public, by acting on data collection to do the news, in streets<sup>34</sup>. Thus, it is possible to build a consensus of the social representation structure of the northeastern media communicators in relation to the accent their region, for there is no important

specificities when considering an external factor, such as the role each professional plays.

## ■ CONCLUSION

The results presented indicate that the television media northeastern communicators, represented in this research by TV journalists working in the state of Pernambuco, structure the social representation of the northeastern accent in three distinct areas on the maps projections. Each area consists in a facet of representation of these professionals on the subject studied, which provides information about the structure of these representations and what they are anchored in.

Briefly, the structure of northeastern communicators' representations, in regard to accent, has: in the area Space, the accent as a regional practice; in the Identity, the accent as a feature in the speech of their identity as Northeastern people; and, in the Concept, the prejudice of others in relation to the Northeast, directed to the speech. This can be seen in the exclusion of the speaker's identity marks for a more acceptable speech to the professional environment. The presence of the northeastern accent can be considered as a limiting factor for the rise in the labor market when present in situations of professional presentation.

Accent softening in this context extends the communicator's possibilities in the labor market. Even so, the presence of accent in the speech of this professional is not considered a problem in communication, so that the interests of communicators is that the softened pattern is present only during the professional practice, with no intention of losing the speech features that represent the identity of the region that they belong to.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** descrever o conteúdo das representações sociais do comunicador de mídia nordestino acerca do seu sotaque. **Métodos:** a coleta de dados foi realizada em duas etapas. Na primeira, foi empregada a técnica de associação livre, na qual 50 universitários apresentaram o que pensavam diante da palavra “sotaque”. Na segunda, por meio do Procedimento de Classificações Múltiplas (PCM), 25 comunicadores atuantes na Região Metropolitana do Recife classificaram as 15 palavras mais associadas pelos estudantes de duas maneiras, classificação livre e dirigida. Na classificação livre, os comunicadores agruparam as palavras segundo critérios por eles estabelecidos, enquanto que na classificação dirigida, as palavras foram classificadas de acordo com o grau de associação com o termo MEU SOTAQUE. A análise foi realizada utilizando-se métodos estatísticos multidimensionais, que permitiram construir a estruturação do campo das Representações Sociais. **Resultados:** três regiões delimitadas expressam a representação dos sujeitos sobre sotaque: Conceito, Identidade e Espaço. Na primeira, há seis categorias (engraçado, diferente, arrastado, matuto, preconceito, oxente), na segunda, as palavras são identidade, característica, língua, fala e cultura, próximas ao termo meu sotaque e, na terceira, região, regionalismo, nordeste e localidade. Identidade foi o termo mais relacionado ao termo MEU SOTAQUE, enquanto que os itens menos relacionados são os presentes na região conceito, exceto pelo termo oxente. **Conclusão:** o sotaque nordestino é tido como uma marca da identidade e cultura da região Nordeste. Os comunicadores suavizam características do falar nordestino durante o exercício profissional para se adequar ao padrão preconizado pelo mercado de trabalho sem perder a sua identidade.

**DESCRITORES:** Meios de Comunicação de Massa; Jornalismo; Psicologia Social

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-0216201517610215>

Received on: July 11, 2015

Accepted on: September 15, 2015

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